University of Alberta

The Problem of a Non-Mimetic Chinese Poetics

By

Zhong Lin

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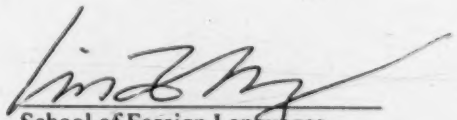

School of Foreign Languages
Southwest-China Normal University
Chongqing, P. R. China

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E. D. Blodgett

Milan V. Dimić

Nasrin Rahimieh

Paul A. Robberecht

Jenn-Shann Jack Lin

for Jan W. Walls

Abstract

This dissertation takes issue with the currently popular view that the literary tradition wholly indigenous to China produced no theory of mimesis. While we have to admit that in many respects Western poetics and Chinese poetics do differ, and oftentimes significantly, from each other, as is usual and natural for phenomena from very different cultures, it is the author's belief, however, that it is excessive and even wrong to put Chinese poetics and Western poetics at two opposite poles and call one mimetic and the other non-mimetic or un-mimetic, or to assume that *mimesis* is simply something Western, and not present in Chinese literary tradition until the very end of the last century. Therefore, the present dissertation focuses on a philological investigation into the Chinese idea about the relationship between literary works and the world, both natural and human, in comparison with the Western conception of artistic *mimesis*. By juxtaposing the Chinese and Western traditional views on the nature of literature, this dissertation endeavors to demonstrate that a mimetic theory of literature had not only existed but also formed one of the major currents in the early Chinese literary tradition.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Since James Liu's general survey of Chinese literary theory in his extremely influential book, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975), East-West comparative poetics has been increasingly the focus of study among the East-West comparatists. The past twenty years has witnessed the publication of a large number of excellent works in this field, Zhang Longxi's *The Tao and the Logos,* Adel's *Chinese Approaches to Literature: from Confucius to Liang Qichao*, Earl Miner's *Comparative Poetics,* Saussy's *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*, James Liu's *Language – Paradox – Poetics*, to name but a few. This unprecedented enthusiasm in China-West comparative poetics is largely due to the positive influence of James Liu. Many of these works are, to a large extent, dialogues, either directly or indirectly, with Liu. While many of Liu's conclusions about Chinese poetics, especially those concerning the nature of Chinese literary language, have been seriously questioned and debated by other scholars, his firm belief that traditional Chinese poetics is free of any mimetic notion of literature has been generally accepted almost without challenge. This conclusion is obviously the basis upon which Liu's whole theoretical system can be said to be built, and therefore, we have many discussions, or, sometimes, merely reassertions, of it in his various works. For example, in his *Chinese Theories of Literature*, he managed to find the Chinese counterpart of every imaginable traditional Western label of literary theory, from metaphysical to pragmatic, didactic to self-expressive; but he refuses to admit that, in the Chinese literary tradition, there is anything similar to the Western mimetic theory of art. He takes a great deal of trouble to explain why early Chinese poetics required that literary works reflect the times and the real situation of society while still being non-mimetic. In his last book, *Language–Paradox–Poetics*, James Liu, arguing chiefly

from the Taoist metaphysical view of language and literature, maintains that while to Western people, such as "Plato and his successors, writing is an imperfect imitation or representation of oral speech, just as art is an imperfect imitation of the phenomenal world..., the Chinese thinkers and writers did not have a mimetic concept of language," and in the same sense, they were also free from a mimetic concept of art (Liu, 1988:106). The idea that ancient Chinese writers and thinkers did not have a mimetic concept of art is clearly expressed by Liu when he tries to point out the difference between Ingarden's indeterminacy theory and that of the traditional Chinese thinkers and writers. Defying Iser's claim that Ingarden broke away from the traditional, that is, Western, view of art as representation, Liu remarks that "I think Ingarden did not free himself entirely from the traditional Western mimetic concept of art" (Liu, 1988:106), meaning that, to Liu, traditional Chinese critics were completely free from the mimetic concept of art. This is how his argument goes:

> To him [Ingarden], a successful concretization of literary work depends on the degree to which the concretized work resembles one's experience of the "real" world. In contrast, Chinese poets and critics, who often had either an [individualistic and personal] expressive or a [self-transcendent] "metaphysical" concept of poetry [i.e. literature manifests or explores the underlying principle, the Dao, of the universe], were interested not in detailed representations of reality but in capturing the essential "spirit" (*shen) or "mood" (qu*) or "tone" (*yun)* of a poetic world, to which particulars are often irrelevant. (106)

Those square brackets, except the first pair around "Ingarden," are all added by his editor, Richard Lynn. The reason for Lynn to do this, according to Lynn himself, is "for the sake of style or clarity" (Liu, 1988:vii). In our present case, it is obviously for clarity. Given that Lynn is not only Liu's editor and student but also one of the few

outstanding scholars of our time in traditional Chinese literature and literary theory, no one, perhaps, has a better grasp of Liu's theory than he does. Therefore, we can safely assume that what is in the brackets, in the quotation above, is just as much Liu's as it is Richard Lynn's. If that is the case, it is then not only obvious that, in place of the Western mimetic concept of art, James Liu proposes a non-mimetic, metaphysical and expressive theory of art as the nature of traditional Chinese literature and literary theory; it is also clear that the Chinese expressive demand that Liu argues for is an "individualistic and personal" expressivism.James Liu has so firmly established this non-mimetic notion about Chinese literature and poetics that it is now planted, it seems, in the minds of scholars and students of Chinese literature, West and East alike. It is no longer an issue to be discussed or debated, but a "fact" upon which other conclusions about Chinese literature and literary theory can be based. As Saussy (1993:24-26) points out, scholars such as Pauline Yu and Andrew Plaks have based their argument that allegory and metaphor are not found in Chinese literary tradition on the basis of a non-mimetic theory of literature. Saussy himself, although arguing vigorously against Yu and Plaks' view about Chinese allegory, also endorses the non-mimetic claim and tends to insist that an expressive theory underlines the whole *Great Preface* of the *Shijing*. Earl Miner, although having discarded the "Eurocentric" term "non-mimetic" when describing eastern poetics, prefers to call the eastern tradition "affective-expressive unmimesis" (1990:25). From Miner's use of the term, "unmimesis," I can hardly perceive any major difference between his term and "non-mimesis." The two terms share, to my understanding at least, too much in meaning to be essentially different.

This non-mimetic notion about Chinese poetics is not only maintained by the aforementioned scholars, who chiefly work on Chinese literary theory in the West, but also advocated by critics who work in the native Chinese environment. Among the latter, we have such critics as Feng Qi, a modern Chinese Philosopher, and Chen Liangyun, a famous literary critic and professor of Chinese. Feng Qi, when comparing Western and Eastern aesthetics, notices that "while the Western people developed, in the early stage of their poetics, the 'imitative' (*mo fang*模仿) and 'typical character' theories, which are, first of all, based on narrative literature and fine arts, the ancient Chinese critics developed the 'expressive' (*yan zhi shuo*) and artistic '*yi jing*'[1] theories, which are, first of all, based on lyrics and music" (Chen Liangyun, 1991:339).[2] Following Feng's idea, Chen Liangyun argues that "it is because of the very fact that narrative literature was not prosperous in ancient China, at least before Sung and Yuan periods, as it was in the Western literary history that there lacks, in Chinese poetics, the kind of literary theory similar to that of the realist poetics which bases itself on narrative literature" (Chen Liangyun, 1991:339). Miner (1990) follows exactly the same line of thought in explaining why China did not develop a mimetic theory of art, although he differs from them in that he insists that the originative Western poetics, that is, Aristotle's *Poetics*, was based on drama, instead of narrative. Lu Zhenghui, a Taiwanese scholar, expresses an idea similar to those of Chen and Feng:

> From its very beginning, Chinese literary theory has emphasized the expression of the internal feelings of the subject (i.e., person/author). This lyrical notion of literature is diagonally opposite to the situation of the West. Western literary theory, from its Greek beginnings to the eighteenth century, focused on the representation of the objective world (including both the natural and human worlds) in literary works. This tendency in Western literary

> theory is what is usually called "mimetic theory." This sharp contrast between Chinese and Western literary theories is, from the point of view of comparative literature, indeed interesting and worth studying. (Lu, 1988:285)

The reason for such prevalence, among native Chinese scholars, of this notion about Chinese literary theory appears to be three-fold. First, the expressive theory has indeed been one of the major currents of traditional literary theory, especially since the Tang Dynasty. There is no doubt about this and I do not intend to argue against it. Secondly, it is likely that most native Chinese scholars, as implied in Feng Qi, quoted above, have developed a narrow or even skewed understanding of the Western concept of *mimesis*, because the Chinese translation of *mimesis*, *mofang*, like the English word, *imitation*, suggests a strict literal copy of what already exist in the phenomenal world. Even such fine scholars as James Liu, as William F. Touponce (1981) points out, is suspect of such a short-coming; for example, in the previously quoted passage, where Liu discusses the difference between Ingarden's indeterminacy theory and the Chinese non-mimetic tradition, Liu seems to be working on a very superficial interpretation of the Western concept of *mimesis*, because his statement seems to imply that the Western *mimesis* cared little about "capturing the essential 'spirit' (*shen)*" and all it cared was the "particulars." Thirdly, James Liu's theory has been so popular among native Chinese scholars, perhaps, also because, as Touponce has hinted, the "[individualistic and personal] expressive or a [self-transcendent] 'metaphysical' concept of poetry" (Liu, 1988:106), which Liu posits, helps the Chinese scholars locate a theory, from which "distinctively Chinese contributions to an eventual universal theory of literature are most likely to be derived" (Liu, 1975:16). Oddly enough, as Touponce rightly

observes, "this 'distinctively Chinese' theory can be grasped only as a kind of difference from and exclusion of Western theories of mimesis" (Touponce, 360).

Touponce appears to be, to my knowledge, the only Western scholar, who has so far seriously challenged James Liu's claim of a non-mimetic Chinese poetics. In his article "Straw Dogs: A Deconstructive Reading of the Problem of Mimesis in James Liu's *Chinese Theories of Literature*," Touponce finds Liu's "assertion that the literary tradition wholly indigenous to China produced no theory of mimesis" curious, because he believes that "mimesis is a universal phenomenon" (360). Touponce's approach, as his title suggests, is that of a deconstructionist. His central task is to try to dismantle Liu's theory by questioning the appropriateness of his phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches to Chinese literary theory, on the one hand, and demonstrating that "mimesis cannot be excluded from the Chinese context" "by showing Liu's failure to exclude mimetic phenomena from his own discourse" (360), on the other. Although, Touponce has done an excellent job in deconstructing James Liu's claim of metaphysical theory of literature as the most distinctive feature of Chinese poetics, the constructive evidences he presents to support his claim of a Chinese *mimetic* literary theory from original texts of Chinese literary criticism are few and not very convincing. This is perhaps due, first, to the fact that his paper seeks to deconstruct Liu's claim rather than to construct a Chinese mimetic theory of literature; secondly, it may also because that, as Touponce himself admitted in the article, he is not a sinologist and has to rely on English translations. As a result, it appears to me that Touponce is also guilty, to some extent, of what he accuses James Liu of, that is, "working within the closure of Western" (Chang Han-Liang, 387) modern theoretical approaches.

Therefore, while James Liu approaches Chinese poetics from a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives, Touponce has to rely on Derrida's and Girard's theories of *mimesis* to maintain his belief that *mimesis* is a universal phenomenon. The fact that James Liu's claim of a non-mimetic theory is still firmly maintained by such authoritative texts as Miner's *Comparative Poetics* seems to indicate that Touponce's effort has not been quite successful. I believe it is still necessary and valuable for East-West comparatists to further examine this topic, because there is substantial evidence to show that Chinese literary tradition, in both theory and practice, did have a mimetic tendency, even from its very beginning.

Therefore, I take up this task of reexamining the Chinese idea about the relationship between literary works and the world, both natural and human, in comparison with the Western concept of *mimesis*. By juxtaposing the Chinese and Western ideas concerning this relationship, I intend to show that it is not really justifiable to insist that traditional Chinese poetics is non-mimetic or un-mimetic, and demonstrate, as far as possible along the way, what the Chinese mimetic tendency and the Western *mimesis* share and in what way they differ. Therefore, my approach will differ from that of Touponce. While Touponce has undermined the forcefulness of James Liu's argument by deconstructing his phenomenological and hermeneutic theoretical basis, I will concentrate on presenting constructive evidence from original texts of Chinese literary criticism. Western *mimesis*, as the working definition in this dissertation, will be based on the traditional meanings of the term as found in writers from Plato to the neo-classicists, instead of any modern extension of the term.

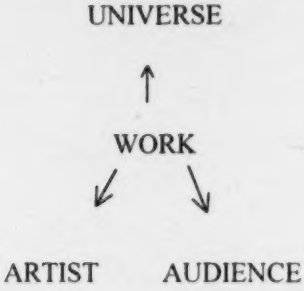
Noticing how Touponce's lone voice has been drowned in the outcry of a non-mimetic or un-mimetic theory of Chinese poetics, I realize how difficult this task is and how dangerous it might be to choose such a topic for a PhD dissertation. Therefore, in order to shed some of the unwanted burden and any potential misunderstanding, I would like to make it clear from the very outset that although I insist that a mimetic idea of literature has been present in Chinese literary theory, even from its very beginning, 1) it is not my intention to minimize the difference between Chinese and Western poetics. They do differ, and oftentimes significantly, from each other in many respects, as is usual and natural for phenomena from such drastically different cultures; and if there were not these significant differences between them, it would be meaningless to compare them; 2) I am not suggesting that the Chinese idea of representation is exactly the same as that in the West, nor that it has always occupied an important position as it has had in the West till the neo-classical period; 3) nor am I trying to prove that metaphysical and individualistic and personal expressive theories were not important in Chinese theories of literature; 4) finally, I am not trying to dismantle the whole system of James Liu's theory, as Touponce seems to be doing. What I will try to demonstrate, chiefly by constructively presenting and analyzing evidence from original Chinese texts, is that the idea that literature should truthfully represent the world was indeed present in Chinese theory of literature and art, and that, during certain periods, it was even promoted to a very prominent position.

Also, since the Chinese literary tradition has a history of nearly three thousand years, to have a full examination of even this one concept of literary theory through the whole tradition would be too ambitious a task. Therefore, I concentrate chiefly on Early

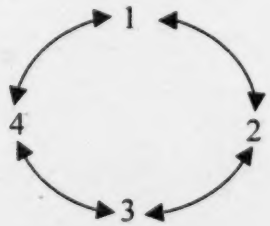
China, although very often I will, where necessary, draw evidence from later periods. By Early China, I mean the time from the beginning till the end of the North and South Dynasties, i.e., 581 A. D., a division generally adopted by modern literary theorists in both Taiwan and Mainland China. My decision on this time period for a comparison with the Western concept of *mimesis* is not that it is chronologically more comparable to the Western classical period, but chiefly that this is the period in which a mimetic tendency was most prominent in the whole Chinese literary history. Scholars such as James Liu (1988) and Zhang Longxi have already observed how the study of comparable literary ideas "in cultures as drastically different as the Chinese and the Western precludes comparisons in chronological order" (Zhang Longxi, 1993:xiii), because such ideas usually emerge from different time periods in China and the West. Here I only want to add that since there is no known mutual influence whatsoever in our case, nor are we interested in claiming precedence for either side, the chronological difference is really irrelevant to us. However, when I am dealing with the development of the concept of *mimesis* in China and the West respectively, I will try, as far as possible, to remain close to the chronological order.

That I can argue for a co-existence of mimetic and expressive theory of literature may seem odd to many Chinese scholars and sinologists, just as it seems odd to me and scholars like Touponce that James Liu and his followers have to vigorously exclude a mimetic theory in order to maintain an expressive theory. To me, such an effort is really unnecessary. Two reasons may be proposed: first, even if expressivism is viewed extremely, as in Liu's system, as the expression of personal, subjective feelings, and thus mutually exclusive of any mimetic tendency, the Chinese literary tradition, with its

long history, could still have accommodated both, just as the mimetic emphasis and the expressive urge have both existed in the West, albeit at different times; secondly, if we take another look at the four relationships in the literary process, we will see that expression and representation are two essential aspects accompanying any literary creation and do not have to be mutually exclusive. Scholars such as M. H. Abrams (1953) and James Liu himself (1975, 1982) have repeatedly discussed the four elements of the literary creative process. Abrams has put the four into the following diagram:

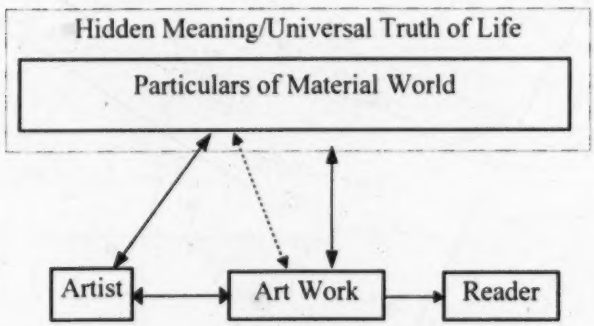


James Liu seems to feel that Abrams' diagram does not quite capture the true relationship among the four elements in the literary process and has, therefore, developed his own version of the four relationships:



1. world; 2. artist; 3. work of art; 4. audience or spectator

A careful description of the interrelationships of the four elements does not seem to be Abrams' major concern, for what he meant to show with his diagram is the different orientations of different Western literary theories. His diagram does, however, indicate that the interrelationship between world, work, artist and audience is multidimensional, because Abrams describes his diagram as "a triangle ... with the work of art ...in the center" (6). In spite of the cyclic appearance of Liu's diagram, it is may be suspected of reducing the multi-dimensional nature of the interrelations of the four elements into a linear arrangement. There appears to be no direct or immediate relations between world and work whatsoever. Given Liu's emphasis that in the Chinese tradition the world is only important insofar as it stimulates the feelings of the artist, this arrangement is quite understandable. However, the real relationships between the four elements are a little more complex than that. Therefore, I propose the following:



In drawing this diagram, I have left out the complexity associated with the factor of the "reader," for example, the reader's relation with the world, his/her contribution to the (future) meaning of the work, difference between reader's world and the world that a

literary work is supposed to be representing. I left these aspects out of the diagram because our concern here is with the creative process of a literary work, instead of its perception. With this diagram I intend to show that any literary work, be it pre-modern, modern or post-modern, would involve at least the five aspects in the chart, namely, 1) the particulars of the material world or reality, 2) the writer as both a social/human being and a creative agent, 3) the literary work itself, 4) the reader and 5) the universal principle, and/or hidden meaning, of life.

It is important for us to realize the difference between the "Particulars of Material World" and the world that a literary work is said to represent. There is really no direct relationship between the "Particulars of Material World" and the work, because between them, there is always the author/artist. Therefore, I use a broken line to indicate this indirect relationship, which may be interpreted as the material world *determines* (James Liu, 1975) or *affects* (Miner, 1991) the work. On the other hand, the finished work *represents or reflects* the world. However the world in this sense is no longer merely the particulars of material world; rather, it includes both the particulars and the truth or patterns underlying the particulars of material world. Therefore, on the diagram, there is a solid line between work and world. I shall come back to discuss some of these aspects in more detail in the course of my dissertation; for now, let us consider why expressive and mimetic theories do not have to be mutually exclusive. As the diagram indicates, a work of art must necessarily have a relationship with its author, on the one hand, and another with the world, on the other. With relation to its author, the work of art can be, and most often is, an expression of ideas, attitudes, emotions, etc. In terms of the world, it is at the same time a representation. In other words, a

literary work of art is a representation of reality only insofar as it is represented through the perspective of the author, for an author is not just the creative agent of the work, he must necessarily be a human being first who is never free from subjectivity. Even in reportorial articles, for example, no two authors would, or even could, represent the same event exactly the same. The degree of difference in their respective reports is usually proportionate to their differences in terms of their life-views, social position, and personalities and even moods on the occasion of writing. Therefore, expression and representation is most often found in one and the same work of art. Expression and representation are simply two aspects in the same process, only viewed from different perspectives. If we can see this, it would appear less far-fetched, I believe, for me to insist that a mimetic theory can exist, even, side by side with an expressive one.

The main body of the dissertation has four chapters as follows:

Chapter one is a reexamination of the Western concept of *mimesis*. This is necessary for two reasons: 1) As mentioned earlier, many Chinese scholars, including James Liu himself, very often base their comparison of Chinese and Western poetics on a narrow, and even superficial understanding of Western *mimesis*. 2) We need the Western concept of mimesis as a frame of reference, for, after all, this is a (re)search of a Chinese mimetic tendency in comparison with that in the West. It is, therefore, necessary to briefly trace the development of the concept in the West from its Greek beginning till the neo-classical period and demonstrate that *mimesis* in the West is far more complex than the Chinese word, *mofan*, or even the English word, *imitation,* can literally suggest. While I will concentrate on the relationship between world and work

that the concept of *mimesis* suggests, I will also try to reveal other aspects of the literary process implicit in Western mimetic theory, such as the writer's active role, *mimesis* and human emotions, and the function of art as *mimesis* in society, because when we use the term *mimesis* to refer to the Western literary tradition in comparison with that of the East, the connotation of the term has already been expanded to include all the interrelationships among the four coordinates of the literary process in the mimetic tradition. In this chapter, I do not claim to have anything new to say about the Western concept of *mimesis,* for it is meant more to be a reexamination of the various meanings of *mimesis* than a redefinition of the term. Through this reexamination, I intend to show that 1) as a concept that describes the interrelationship between world and artistic work, *mimesis* has been applied, by different writers, and at different times, very differently; its meaning ranged from "a literal, direct copy" to "complete fiction created by the artist;" 2) in the Western mimetic tradition, the artist is seldom viewed as an agent standing aloof or detached and simply reflecting the image of the concrete world as a mirror or a modern video camera. The artist has a very active role to play, for the creative process is not only the process of imitation, but also a cognitive and intellectual process through which the artist, as a human being, makes sense of the particulars of the world that surrounds him/her.

The rhetorical meaning, i.e., the Roman *imitatio*, however, is not examined in this chapter, because what I am mainly interested in in this dissertation is to demonstrate that a mimetic relationship between work and world does exist in the Chinese literary tradition.

Chapter two is an examination of the importance of the mimetic idea in various aspects of life in ancient China. It is my intention to demonstrate that this tendency is fundamental to the Chinese way of life, because it was prevalent in most of the major areas of ancient Chinese ideas, such as the theory of the origin of Chinese characters, i.e., the writing system, the concept of *wen,* i.e., writing and the literary quality of writing, the ethico-political philosophy of Confucius and the Daoist philosophy of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. The chapter concentrates on the mimetic tendencies in the Daoist and Confucian philosophical writings and their influences upon Chinese theories of art.

Chapter three reexamines some of the literary theories pronounced in the "Prefaces" to the *Shijing* and other important early *Shijing* commentaries, with the intention of demonstrating that the idea of mimesis, in spite of the catch phrase "*shi yan zhi,*" that is, Poetry speaks of intent, was not absent from the early Chinese literary tradition, either in criticism or in poetic practice. I will examine 1) the "Great Preface" and try to reveal its mimetic theory of poetry; 2) the strong pragmatist and historicist tendencies in traditional *Shijing* criticism and their strong mimetic implications; 3) the "Six Arts" of the *Shijing* and their mimetic nature. This chapter also attempts to demonstrate that the "*shi yan zhi*" theory is very different from what James Liu calls "expressive theory," because the *zhi* (intent) was not meant to be personal. It was mostly the intent concerning state affairs.

The fourth chapter takes up the issue of *shensi*, that is, resemblance in spirit/essence, and *xingsi*[3], that is, resemblance in form/appearance. Traditional Chinese philosophers and literary scholars have debated for centuries their precedence in importance. Naturally, *shensi* was accepted as the most important criterion of both fine

arts and literature. Because of the prominent position of the *shensi* theory in traditional Chinese theory of art, modern scholars tend to argue that Chinese literary theory does not care for *xingsi*, which is, unfortunately, a concept very close to the literal meaning of *mimesis*, especially as Plato defines it in the *Republic 10*: a representation of physical forms/appearances. As a result, many scholars believe that the emphasis upon *shensi* precludes a mimetic theory in the Chinese literary and fine arts tradition. This chapter examines the development of these two theories in both fine arts theory and literary theory and demonstrate that 1) in no time of Chinese history, except the very recent centuries, the *shensi* theory was emphasized to the extent that excluded *xingsi* as its basis. In most painting and literary theoretical writings, the two are well-balanced; 2) *shensi* does not really mean non-mimetic or un-mimetic; nor does it necessarily suggest a metaphysical or expressive theory, as some modern scholars, Zheng Yuyu (1988) for instance, tend to maintain. The term literally indicates, if, ironically, I have to say the obvious, that a literary or artwork should *resemble (si)* what it is trying to depict/represent. Only this *resemblance* is not merely a physical one (i.e., *xingsi*), but rather, a resemblance in essence and spirit. It would be right to claim that *shensi* theory requires more than "a literal copy," but to insist that it excludes *mimesis* is erroneous. This demand of *resemblance in essence/spirit* is, in fact, quite resonant with Aristotle's demand of *mimesis*.

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[1] Yi jing(意境), a later variant of *jing jie* theory(境界说), was first developed during the Tang Dynasty (618-709A.D.) by the famous poet Wang Changling王昌龄(?-756) from the Buddhist usage of the word. Literally, *yi* means the mind or idea; *jing* means world or territory and *jie* means border. While in its Buddhist usage, *jing jie* was used by the translators of Buddhism Scriptures mostly to refer to the state of mind or man's subjective feelings toward the objective world, Wang Changling borrowed the word to

mean three things that co-exist in a poem: 1) the material world (*wu jing*); 2) the emotional world (*qing jing*); and 3) the ideational world (*yi jing*). After Wang, the term was broken into two terms, "*shi jing* (real/concrete world)," in place of Wang's "material world," and "*xu jing* (virtual world)," in place of Wang's "emotional world" and "ideational world." In recent times, the term, "*yi jing*," together with its predecessor, "*jing jie*," has been taken to mean the artistic state (no longer three co-existing states) resulting from the intermingling or merging of the poet's subjective feeling and the material scenery. But here, the material scenery is no longer understood as the natural scenery, for, as explained by Lin Qinnan, a translator and critic in the beginning of this century, "that which is called *yi* originates from the heart, that which is called *jing* originates from *yi*," therefore, *yi jing* is taken as something completely from the inner world and consequently, as it seems to most people, has nothing to do with the material world any more. *Jing jie* theory is best represented in Wang Guowei's *Remarks on Ci Poetry of the World (ren jian ci hua)*.

[2] Quoted in Chen Liangyun (1991). Translation and square brackets mine.

[3] Both *shensi* 神似 and *xingsi* 形似 are compound words with a noun-predicative adjective pattern, which in Chinese linguistic terminology, belongs to the category of "pianzhen cizu," that is, a phrase or word group consisting of a modifier and the word it modifies. The central (*zhen*) part in both terms is the same, which is *si*, meaning "resembling" or "resemblance." The word *shen*, the modifier in the first term, means "in essence/spirit." *Xing*, the modifier in the second term, means "physical form/appearance." Although, the two terms emphasize a resemblance in different aspects, the idea of "resemblance" is the basis of both.

Chapter 1

Western Mimesis

Due to its long history of evolution, during which process it has acquired many different layers of meaning, the term *Mimesis* is perhaps the most troublesome among Western literary concepts. Although the view that "poetry and the visual arts in some sense represented, depicted or dramatized reality (whether actual or potential)," as Halliwell (1988:7) and Sikes (1969:73), among others, suggest, had probably long been assumed and described in the concept of *mimesis* before Plato's time, Plato is the first who consciously employs the term and elaborates, albeit negatively, to a noticeable extent on its nature. Plato is, however, first of all, a philosopher, rather than literary critic. When he discusses poetry or art, his chief concern is, therefore, not poetry or creative art as such, but poetry's role in society: its educational, ethical and epistemological significance. As a result, Plato's discussion of *mimesis* is not systematic nor always consistent. Because Plato chooses to compete with the poets and stands firmly on the side of the philosophers in the age-old quarrel between philosophy and poetry, he is generally antagonistic to the art of *mimesis.* He, therefore, tends to measure *mimesis* negatively against his idealist and moralist metaphysics and epistemology. Consequently, *mimesis* to Plato, as we will see in the first part of this chapter, implies a literal, direct and often servile copying of existing objects or past incidents. It is used, in spite of Plato's various interpretations, in the more "proper sense" of the word as Thomas Twining (1972 rpt.) defines when he differentiates the "proper" and "improper senses" of the word *imitation.* Aristotle inherits his master's idea that all creative arts are *mimesis*, but only on the basis of a quite different definition of *mimesis*. To spell out the detailed differences of the Aristotelian *mimesis* from that of Plato and later literary scholars will be the task of the second part of this chapter. For now, suffice it to say that Aristotle's *mimesis* no longer indicates a

literal, direct and "imagistic" (Else, 1967:27) copy of the thing imitated. It becomes an organic representation of the universals, instead of the particulars, types, instead of individuals, according to the principle of probability and inevitability. Horace, whom we are going to discuss as a representative of the late classical period, shows the influence of the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*, when he is not using the term rhetorically. Because of his pragmatic epistemology and rhetorical bent, however, Horace has given the Aristotelian *mimesis* a moralistic and rhetorical twist; as a result, he stresses more of the verisimilitude of character drawing than the probability of plot. While Aristotle discusses poetry as autonomous, Horace emphasizes, similar to Plato, the instructional value of poetry. The Middle Ages and the Renaissance witnessed the hegemony of Horace's approach to poetry. The moralistic tendency of the mimetic theory remained strong in spite of the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Sidney is surely one of the best representative of the Renaissance, during which period scholars generally tended to interpret Aristotle in the vein of Horace. However, Sidney also shows strong influences of Plato. While maintaining the Horatian theory that poetry should "benefit as well as please," Sidney developed a kind of "ideal mimesis," that is, the poet does not imitate nature, but creates a golden world, which is even better than that found in Nature, from his "Idea or fore-conceit" of it. During the neo-classical period, the doctrines of Aristotle and Horace continued to be considered fundamental. Literary works were still thought to be an imitation of nature and life; and the function of mimesis is still to instruct by means of pleasure. For example, Samuel Johnson, at the peak of neo-classicism, writes: "The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing" (Preface, 97[1]); and "[n]othing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general

nature" (Preface, 94). As far as the function of poetry is concerned, Johnson is in line with Horace and Sidney. His idea that poetry imitates "general nature" shows him to be a descendent of Aristotle. However, Johnson's "just representation of general nature," as we will see later, seems very different from Aristotle's "universality" through the imitation of action.

Even a quick and superficial look, such as the one we just had in the preceding paragraphs, at its historical evolution would tell us that Western *mimesis*, although having a continuous tradition from early antiquity till the eighteenth century, has had many different meanings and applications at different times and with different critics. Regrettably, however, many Chinese scholars and Western Sinologists tend, either consciously or unconsciously, to misrepresent and simplify the concept into its most superficial version, when they come to compare Chinese poetics with that of the West. In order to have a more solid foundation and more comprehensive frame of reference for our later discussion of a Chinese theory of mimesis, I propose, in this chapter, to have a more detailed look than most Chinese scholars and Sinologists, such as James Liu (1975), Chen Liangyun (1991), and even William F. Touponce (1981), have so far provided, at the concept of *mimesis* in the Western tradition.

Although the concept continued to evolve far beyond the neo-classical period, in the theories of Coleridge, the Romantics, the realists and naturalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Chicago Neo-Aristotelians, Derrida the Deconstructionist and René Girard the anthropologist, to name a few, for our present purpose I will concentrate on its meanings before the nineteenth century, as used by Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Sidney and Johnson. Plato's idea of *mimesis* will not be discussed in the light of the Neo-Platonic

development of the idea. However, it is not my intent to treat Plato's ideas on *mimesis* negatively in favor of those of Aristotle. This chapter is meant more to be a reexamination of the various meanings of *mimesis* than a redefinition of the term. Therefore, I have chosen to follow the interpretations of Plato's concept of *mimesis* in modern Western scholarship. It hoped that, through a recapitulation of each of these thinkers' theories concerning the concept of *mimesis*, we could not only reveal how complicated the concept is and what exactly some of the different meanings of the concept are, but also demonstrate that in spite of its claim of objectivity, the Western mimetic tradition has always noticed and emphasized the intellectual, cognitive as well as emotional participation on the part of the poet/author in the creative process.

I. Plato: Mimesis as Mirroring of Appearances

Although Plato said so many evocative things about poetry that Western literary theory, starting from Aristotle, it has often been suggested (George, 1971; Preminger, 1974), was but a series of footnotes to Plato's literary theory, Plato, as mentioned earlier, is not a professed literary critic. He does not have a special work devoted to the systematic analysis of literary principles as Aristotle does; such a book from Plato is hardly possible because to treat poetry as something autonomous with its own essential principles that qualify it as a real entity with a human significance in terms of the search of beauty and truth would be against Plato's moralistic antagonism toward poetry and his idealist epistemology and metaphysics. Plato's outlook on poetry and fine arts can, therefore, only be gathered from his attacks on poetry scattered in various dialogues, the more important of which include *Ion,* parts of *Symposium, Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and Books 3 &

10 of the *Republic* and Book 8 of the *Laws*. His discussion on artistic *mimesis* is chiefly found in Books 3 and 10 of the *Republic*. Richard McKeon (1952) has argued in favor of a multi-layered application of *mimesis* in Plato, observing that "the word 'imitation,' as Plato uses it, is at no time established in a literal meaning or delimited to a specific subject matter… It is sometimes used to differentiate some human activities from others or some part of them from another part …; it is sometimes used in a broader sense to include all human activities; it is sometimes applied even more broadly to all processes – human, natural, cosmic, and divine" (McKeon, 1952:149). Therefore, not only arts, philosophy, and discourse are mimetic, any and all human institutions, actions, virtues, things would be imitations, as well. This claim is no doubt largely true. But since a study of the significance of *mimesis* in Plato's whole philosophic system is beyond the scope of our present discussion, I am going to confine myself primarily to Plato's applications of the term to poetry. And when thus applied, Plato seems to have given *mimesis* two senses: one is found in *Republic 3* and the other, chiefly, in *Republic 10*.

In Book 3, it is clear that by *mimesis* Plato simply means "impersonating." Here, like elsewhere, Plato does not concern himself with *mimesis* itself, but the grave damaging effects the poets and their works are believed to have upon their audience. Plato, through Socrates' voice, first sets out to demonstrate how the subject matters of existing poetry are detrimental and crippling to the education of the young guardians, and the well being, of the Republic. Then starting from 392[2], he shifts his attention from the subject to the style of poetry by announcing, "Enough of the subjects of poetry: Let us now speak of the style" (*RP*, 392). This announcement clearly indicates that what is coming belongs to the stylistic aspect of poetry. And Socrates continues:

> … You are aware, I suppose, that all mythology and poetry is a narration of events, either past, present, or to come?
>
> Certainly, he [Adeimantus] replied.
>
> And narration may be either simple narration, or imitation, or a union of the two? (*RP,* 392)

Three concepts are obviously proposed here: "narration of events," "simple narration" and "mimesis," the first of which includes the latter two. The word, *narration*, in the first sentence quoted above has a different and wider range than in "simple narration," because in the former, it includes both the action and product of narrating and defines more of the relation between poetry and events narrated, i.e., world experienced, while in the latter, it only means the action of narrating and belongs to the stylistic aspect of the creative process. *Mimesis* at this point is only a style on the same level with "simple narration." When Adeimantus, Socrates' interlocutor, fails to understand the significance of this division and the meaning of *mimesis* thus defined, Socrates goes further to explain:

> And a narrative it remains both in the speeches which the poet recites from time to time and in the intermediate passage?
>
> Quite true.
>
> But when the poet speaks in the person of another, may we not say that he assimilates his style to that of the person who, as he informs you, is going to speak?
>
> Yes.
>
> And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation of the person whose character he assumes?
>
> Of Course.
>
> Then in this case the narrative of the poet, whether Homer or another, may be said to proceed by way of imitation? (*RP,* 393)

Therefore, *mimesis* means to assume the role of another, exactly like an actor or actress does on stage while "simple narration" means to speak in the poet's own person

and voice. The Platonic *mimesis* at this point, then, is only equivalent to one of the manners of imitations, namely acting on the stage, in the poetic theory of Aristotle. According to this definition of mimesis, not all poetry is mimetic. Poetry in which the poet speaks in his own person all through, for example, the dithyramb, is not mimetic at all. Some poetry is only partially mimetic, for example, the epic, in which the poet alternates between his own voice and those of the characters. Only dramatic poetry, such as tragedy and comedy, where "the poet's comments are omitted and the passages of dialogue only are left" (*RP,* 394), is purely mimetic.

We should note that even defined, in this manner, as a style, *mimesis* indicates a direct, literal copying relation between the thing or person imitated and the performance of the imitator, because Socrates, when commenting on the imitative narrator, says: "As I was just now saying, he will attempt to represent the roll of thunder, the noise of wind and hail, or creaking of wheels, and pulleys, and the various sounds of flutes, pipes, trumpets, and all sorts of instruments: he will bark like a dog, bleat like a sheep, or crow like a cock; his entire art will consist in imitation of voice and gesture, or will be but slightly blended with narration" (*PR,* 379). *Mimesis* is no more than mimicry, and there is nothing else to the "entire art" of the imitative poet!

Having clarified the meaning of the term *mimesis*, Socrates thinks that he can now judge the mimetic art, the task he set out to accomplish. It only turns out that he still has to fall back to the subject matter of poetry to negate the significance of *mimetic* poetry, because, although Socrates may not have realized it right away, as a manner of narrating a story, *mimesis* is neither morally bad nor good in itself. However, based on his theory that human nature does not allow one person to imitate many things well and that

"imitation beginning in early youth and continuing far into life, at length grow into habits and become a second nature, affecting body, voice and mind" (*RP.* 394), Socrates concludes that only "the pure imitator of virtue" (*RP. 397)* should be admitted into the ideal state.

The concept of *mimesis* in Book 10 seems not so straightforward and has caused much debate among scholars. While McKeon (1952) and Belfiore (1984), among others, insist that there is a continuity between Book 3 and Book 10 in the definition of *mimesis*, many others claim that there is an essential shift in Plato's understanding of the term. Halliwell, for example, insists, in his commentary on Book 10, that "mimesis is now [in Book 10] construed so as to encompass the relation in which effectively all poetry and painting stands to the world, and it is deemed to be a derivative and insubstantial as the production of images with a mirror" (1988: 105). In other words, *mimesis* now becomes the product of the poet, instead of a manner or style as defined in Book 3. Of these two opinions, I am inclined to the latter, not that I fear that to admit inconsistency in Plato's theory would undermine his greatness – on the contrary, I believe, inconsistency would indicate the fertility of such a masterful mind as his – but that a quick look at what scholars like Belfiore and McKeon claim to be consistent in Plato's understanding of *mimesis* would soon confirm the inconsistent theory. So before we turn to Plato's text, let us have a brief look at McKeon and Belfiore's respective conclusions about Plato's *mimesis.*

> Even at this early stage [i.e., in Book 3], "imitation" may be applied to poetry in several senses; according to one, dramatic poetry is imitative of the speech of the characters; according to another, false poetry is imitative of a lie in the soul; according to a third, true poetry is imitative of the good. The lawgiver ... imitates the things which truly are and assimilates himself to them. ... *Through*

> *these varying applications the term 'imitation' indicates a constant relation between something which is and something made like it; the likeness itself may be good or bad, real or apparent.*[3] When, consequently, poetry is examined again in the tenth book of the *Republic* and is found to be imitative, it is incorrect to suppose that the word 'imitation' has been unduly extended or that it has been given a new literal sense." (McKeon, 1952:152)

First of all, the "several senses" that McKeon mentions here do not seem to be different senses of *imitation*. I doubt that it might be better to say that imitation may be applied to *poetry of several senses*, because the difference of the four applications are not in the sense of the term *imitation*, but in the subject-matter of the different types of "poetry," which he lists here. The concept of *imitation* in these cases is used only in one sense, that is, "a relation between something which is and something made like it." But this sense is obviously read into Book 3 from Plato's expansion of the term in Book 10. As we have noted earlier, in Book 3, *mimesis* refers to a manner of narration. Socrates makes this loud and clear by reminding his interlocutor, Adeimantus, twice that when he talk about *mimesis* then, they are dealing with poetry in terms of its style (*RP,* 392, 394). McKeon seems to be holding the meaning of *mimesis* in Book 10 to be the consistent meaning of it in both books.

Belfiore, on the other hand, seems to be imposing the meaning found largely in Book 3 upon the term in both books. Belfiore claims that "what Plato consistently means in Republic 3 and 10 is that 'to imitate is to make one thing (or person) similar to another thing (or person) in sound or shape'" (1984:126). By using the verb form, "to imitate," in replace of the noun, *imitation*, Belfiore obviously suggests that *mimesis* refers to the action of imitating, instead of the "constant relation between something which is and something made like it" that McKeon talks about above. Unless one of them can prove

the other wrong, the consistent interpretation of Plato's *mimesis* in Book 3 and Book 10 would hardly be maintained. But this, I believe, would be a difficult task to accomplish, because there is enough textual evidence from the *Republic* to support both.

Although the phrase "imitative kind of poetry" in the opening sentence of Book 10 seems to suggest that Plato is still using the term, *mimesis,* in the same sense as in Book 3, it is clear that he comes back to the topic of poetry because he has gained some new insight into the nature of *mimesis,* as Socrates tells Glaucon: "as I see far more clearly now that the parts of the soul have been distinguished" (*RP,* 595). Hence he proposes to further define, if not redefine, *mimesis:* "Can you give me a general definition of imitation?" (*PR,* 595). As we recall, in Book 3, Socrates has tried to condemn poetry in terms of its subject and style from the ethical and moral perspective, but he probably sensed some weaknesses in his attack on imitation there, for as a style, imitation is, as mentioned earlier, neither bad nor good by itself. Therefore, in this book, he approaches it from an idealistic metaphysical and epistemological perspective: the nature of *mimesis* examined in relation to truth and real knowledge. He proposes, through the example of the bed, a three-rung hierarchy of truth and knowledge: the bed existing in nature, the bed made by the carpenter and the bed of the painter or the poet. Of the three, only the one in nature, that is, the Form or Idea of bed, supposedly by God, has real existence and contains truth. The craftsman's bed does not have real existence, for "he cannot make what *is*, but only some semblance of existence" (*PR,* 597). The bed of the painter and poet is like an image of a thing in the mirror: an appearance of the bed made by the carpenter, therefore, "thrice removed from the king and from the truth" (*RP,* 597). Furthermore, painters and poets, as imitators, do not even have any grasp of the things

they imitate, because "they try to imitate in each case … the creations of the artificers" "as they appear," instead of "as they are" (*RP,* 597). The poet or painter, like the mirror, "can reproduce all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image." (*RP,* 598). The painter may draw a bit or reins, and his painting may appear to be just like the bits and reins that the craftsman makes, but he does not have a clue about the right form of these things, because only the horseman, Socrates claims, who knows how to use them knows it. Homer and Ion may describe how a general looks like, but they themselves did not have knowledge about "warfare, strategy, the administration of states and the education of man" (*RP,* 599); therefore, Ion was not a general but a rhapsode. The imitator, and his imitation "has no knowledge worth mentioning of what he imitates" (*RP,* 603). Thus poetry as *mimesis* is nothing but an imitation of an imitation or apparition.

Therefore, the Platonic concept of artistic *mimesis*, in spite of its different applications in Book3 and 10, suggests a superficial copying of the original. The copy or the making of this copy is not even considered an art (techne) with its own intrinsic principles and, therefore, its quality has to be measured by its fidelity to the original according to the principles of quantity and quality.

II. Aristotle: Mimesis as Plot-Making or Imitation of an Action

While Plato's method, as scholars such as Grube (1963) and Mckeon (1952), rightly observe, is synoptic, Aristotle's is analytic. Plato regards every subject, poetry being one, "as part of the whole domain of knowledge" (Grube, 1965:66), Aristotle, on the other hand, divides the domain of knowledge into different, comparatively independent

branches and treats each by itself in a separate treatise. Consequently, when Aristotle discusses poetry in the *Poetics*, he can treat it as an autonomous area with its own principles, instead of evaluating poetry according to its function in society[4], as Plato does. Because of the autonomous status that poetry gains in the Aristotelian system, *mimesis*, as the defining feature of poetry, takes on a new meaning.

First of all, the Platonic sense of *mimesis* as "impersonating" is no longer the literal meaning of the concept; it is subsumed by the manner of imitation. This is explicitly stated in Aristotle's brief but clear discussion on the Manner of Imitation (*Poetics*, III), for he says that in narrating a story the poet can 1) speak in his own person at one moment and in that of an assumed character at another, like Homer does; 2) remain in his own person throughout without any such change; or 3) represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described (*Poetics*, III). The third manner that Aristotle points out here is the exact equivalent of Plato's meaning for *mimesis* in Book 3 of the *Republic*, only it is no longer considered to be the only meaning of *mimesis*. This is plain and all critics agree.

However, as to whether Aristotle's *mimesis* describes the relation between world and poetry or that between world and poet, opinions are split. Most translators and commentators before Else, Whitewater and Butcher, for instance, tend to hold that *mimesis* refers to poetry, that is, the final work, as imitation of reality; scholars such as Else, Golden, Hardison argue for a structural interpretation of the term and claim that "Aristotle's imitation is a process" (Golden, 1968:284). Else points out that "*Μιμήσεις* [*mimesis*], like *ποίησις* above, is verbal and active in sense: not 'imitations' or even 'modes of imitation,' with the translators, but 'processes of imitation,' 'imitating.' The

mimetic process is the activity of *ποίητική*. The locus is not in the performance or presentation, where the poet's work finally reaches an audience, nor even in the linguistic composition of the poem in words and verses, but specifically in *the drafting of the plot*, the 'making' of the over-all form of the action" (1967:12). Else's interpretation is indeed stimulating and well argued. But I believe that the conclusions he draws about *mimesis* as process of imitation can equally be applied to the product of that imitative process. John Boyd has said it well that "if it is precisely the poem that is the product of the poet's mimetic activity, its lineaments will automatically have this peculiar character," and therefore, "the substantive *imitation* may also be used with the poem without doing violence to Else's [and all those others who share, in one way or other, Else's structural] claims" (1968:20). We can, therefore, conclude after Boyd that "if the poet is an imitator precisely as a maker, then the product of his making, his poem, is imitative precisely in being a structure" (1968:21).

Once we accept this modification of Else's interpretation by Boyd, it becomes clear that *mimesis*, in the Aristotelian sense, is no longer "an imitation of an imitation," but turned into a structure or a creation or a construct by the poet. The poet is not any more a mere imitator, who, as Plato suggests, reproduces appearances with no knowledge worth mentioning. The poet, as Else suggests, "is an *imitator* in so far as he is a *maker*" (1967:322). Aristotle's *mimesis* is essentially free of the literal sense, or Twining's "proper sense," of the word *imitation*, that is, a faithful copy of existing things. Else is very clear on this point when he writes:

> Aristotle has developed and changed the bearing of a concept which originally meant a faithful copying of preexistent things, to make it mean a creation of things which have never existed, or whose existence, if they did exist, is

> accidental to the poetic process. Copying is after the fact; Aristotle's *mimesis* creates the fact. (1967:322)

Fidelity to the original, therefore, is not even an issue to Aristotle, for *mimesis* thus understood means exactly *fiction*. The poet does not even need an original for his imitation, because he can represent "things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be or things as they ought to be" (*Poetics,* XXV.1)[5]. Therefore, when the poet's description is accused of being untrue to the fact, he can reply, with Sophocles, that "he drew men as they ought to be" (*Poetics,* XXV.6-7). In cases where this reply is not enough, the poet can even say that "this is how men say the thing is" (*Poetics,* XXV.7). Aristotle can even go so far as to claim that to paint a hind without horns is less a serious matter than to paint it inartistically, because, to him, artistic *mimesis*, as a thing constructed, has its own intrinsic principles and its own set of standards, the most important among which is the principle of "probability and inevitability," and that of the universal.

Therefore, even when poetry does represent things as they are or were, it should not be judged according to how true it is to the facts, because that would turn poetry into history. History concerns itself with the particulars of human life. It records without universalizing, therefore, is less philosophical than poetry. A poem, on the other hand, is "an imitation of an action;" its "first principle" and "soul" (*Poetics,* VI.15) is the plot, which should be a unified whole. Aristotle explains that plot means the "arrangement of incidents" (*Poetics,* VI.6) according to the principle of "probability and inevitability," not as they actually happened. Aristotle advises that "a poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities" (XXIV.17). Here I think we should remind

ourselves of two things: first, Aristotle's *mimesis* as fiction, or "something new" that the poet "creates" (Fyfe, 1961:1), should not be taken to suggest that the poet can create just anything out of his fantasy. Aristotle's mind is outward-going or society-oriented. Poetry, in order to be a viable construct, has to imitate "men in action" and has to be based on the ontologically real world. In Boyd's words, "a drama must present, *be about,* a significant human action, for the forms of probability derive ultimately from life" (1968:22). Secondly, and on the other hand, Aristotle's "action" does not simply mean what it usually suggests: an act of doing something, deeds, events or physical activity. While there can be many activities and events in a play, there can be only one action, because Aristotle defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action..." (*Poetics,* VI.1) and reminds us that "the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action" (*Poetics,* VIII.4). Action, as the object of imitation of poetry, springs, Aristotle tells us, from, and is qualified by, the thought and character of its agent. Based on this, Fergusson argues that "it means, rather, the motivation from which deeds spring" (1961:8). And following Butcher's claim that "the *praxis* that art seeks to reproduce is mainly a psychic energy working outwards" (1961:8), Fergusson concludes that "when Aristotle says 'action' (*praxis*) in the *Poetics,* he usually means the whole working out of a motive to its end in success or failure" (1961:9). Therefore, as imitation of human actions, poetry is aimed at representing the process of the whole working out of human motives, instead of particular incidents or activities.

Consequently, the poet, as mentioned earlier, no longer plays merely the role of a passive imitator like a mirror. His intelligence and interpretative point of view become

essential in the making of a poem. The imitative process becomes, in fact, an intellectual/cognitive process. Scholars like Else and Boyd would probably agree that the literary creative process is imitative insofar as it is intellectual. Boyd actually observes that

> it is a truism to speak of Classical art as characteristically intellectual. ... Because the Greeks tended to think of the mind as the pilot of the person, they would naturally think of poetry as involving a special form of mental activity. (Techne, we recall, was a power or activity that directed the knowledge of doing or making from the realm of ordered understanding to actual accomplishment.) (1961:51)

The "mental activity" of the poet is to see through the surface of the particulars of human life in order to detect meaningful patterns, or, in Aristotle's terminology, significant human actions as the object of imitation. Then he has to either select or invent, where necessary, incidents and arrange them into a unified organic plot, which would, in turn, represent the "whole working out of a motive" that has universal human appeal and interest. This process is implicit in Aristotle's principle of "the universal." Although various scholars have applied slightly different labels for it, they basically point out the same idea.

Golden (1968), in his Epilogue to his translation of *Poetics*, maintains that to Aristotle imitation is "a universalizing process," in which the inchoate, undifferentiated and unintelligible particulars are turned into a unified, intelligible work of art, through the poet's effort (1981:284, 292, 294). To Aristotle, Golden argues, there are two extremes in the world: "the world of undifferentiated singulars" and "the world of the universals." The former world is chaotic; the singulars in this world seem to have no relation to one another, therefore, they are unintelligible. A universal, on the other hand,

is "a proposition asserting a relation," and "true propositions are statements of necessity or probability." The poet's task is to "make forays on the unintelligible to discover something that can be understood, a pattern or process, called an action" (1981:289-90). Although a poet's means are different from those of a philosopher, poetic imitation can also bring out the innate order of nature and enable us to deal with the unknown. On the three alternatives that Aristotle proposes for poets, Golden observes that whatever alternative the poet takes, he "can never escape the imperative of intelligibility"(1981:290). He has to confront the unintelligible, and abstract from it something that is in accordance with the principles of universality and necessity or probability. That is, he has to universalize and by so doing, makes "a previously unknown segment of history or nature intelligible." Artistic imitation is, thus, more of "*an interpretation, an understanding of history*"[6] (1981:290) or nature, instead of a passive copy. Therefore, Golden concludes: "a 'universalized action' is the opposite of a copy. The purpose of artistic creation is not to copy history or nature but to make new constructs. History and nature are opaque; the art work is translucent" (1981:291).

Fyfe tends to call what Golden names as the "universalizing process" "idealization:"

> Aristotle defines poetry as a kind of 'imitation.' Perhaps a better translation might be 'expression' or even 'idealization' in the strict meaning of that word. What he means is this: A poet is a 'maker.' The Author of a poem and the author of a scientific treatise both use the same means of expression, i.e., words. But the poem differs from the treatise in that its author 'makes' something. The scientist aims at a purely objective statement of fact. The poet represents life as seen through the medium of his own personality. He creates something new." (1961:1)

Although the claim that the term *mimesis* may be better translated as "expression" sounds too far off the mark set by Aristotle himself, Fyfe's notion of the poet as a

"maker," as we have seen, has largely been accepted and developed by later critics. *Mimesis* as "idealization," can also be justified to a great extent, not just by the principle of "the universal," but also by what Aristotle literally says, in the *Poetics*, of characterization: Aristotle points out that the poet should follow the portrait painters, who reproduces "a likeness which is true to life and yet more beautiful. So to the poet, in representing men who are irascible or indolent, or have other defects of character, would preserve the type and yet ennoble the character" (*Poetics,* XV.8). This suggests that the truth of poetry is an idealized truth. Aristotle restates the same principle in XXV when he claims, in justifying Zeuxis's representing the impossible in his paintings, that "the impossible is the higher thing; for the ideal type must surpass the reality"(*Poetics,* XXV.17). Fyfe's last point that "the poet represents life as seen through the medium of his own personality" also anticipates Golden's understanding that artistic imitation is "an interpretation, and understanding of history." That this claim is true is clear if we accept Else's aforementioned argument that "a poet is an imitator insofar as he is a *maker."* But if we need any direct mentioning of this point in the *Poetics* for conclusive proof, we may go to places such as IV, where Aristotle explains how "poetry now diverged into two directions, according to the individual character of the writer" (*Poetics,* IV.7). Poets all deal with human actions and they all base their poems on human life. But depending on the poet's own character, or "personality," the nature of the action and the aspect of human life represented in their poems are different. "The graver spirits" imitate noble actions and actions of good men" while "the more trivial sort imitate the actions of meaner persons"(*Poetics,* IV.7). Hence tragedy, comedy, satire, etc. The personality of the poet will not only affect the genre and kind of action he chooses to represent, it plays

an important part in how well he will achieve what he chooses to imitate, as well. Even the ability to identify with his characters and their emotions would also affect how well he is able to convey those emotions to his audience (XVII.1-2).

Boyd largely shares Fyfe's point concerning the relation between poetry as imitation and the poet. For Boyd and Else, the poet is not only a maker, he is also, and at the same time, a seer and discoverer. However, Boyd thinks the term "idealization" does not aptly describe the creative process, because the creative process emphasizes, chiefly, "on finding meaning involved in human experience and activity presented in drama and poetry, not on finding its ideal archetype" (1968:25). He prefers the term "ideation," in which process "the poet's creative intelligence finds the potential of meaning in human activity by seeing the struggle for goals in the very concrete and unfinished process that inspires his composition" (1968:25). So he thinks that the poet should look for the 'significant' rather than the 'universal,' although he admits that the latter has valid references as well. In spite of this different emphasis, Boyd's "ideation," just as "idealization" and "universalization," surely points out that the Aristotelian *mimesis* always involves the perspective of the poet. Whatever and however the poem as an imitation of human life turns out to be, its meaning would have to be shaped by the "interpretative point view" (Boyd, 1968:24) of the poet. Consequently, literary *mimesis*, in the Aristotelian sense, can only be realistic inasmuch as it "presents a comment on human action that goes beyond the surface of life" (Boyd, 1968:24).

III. Horace: Mimesis as Verisimilitude in Character-drawing

When discussing Horace's theory of imitation, most modern scholars concentrate on his use of the term in its rhetorical sense, that is, imitation of past masters and their styles, and offer only one or two passing remarks on Horace's theory concerning the relation between poetry and the world. The general conclusion is that Horace had "nothing definite to say" (Atkins, 1961:75) about the Aristotelian theory of *mimesis*; and that Horace's "'imitation' is used only in the rhetorical sense of copying Greek Exemplars" (Boyd, 1968:48). The following observation of Geoffrey Shepherd may serve as a typical example of various modern scholars' opinions on Horace's concept of *mimesis*:

> Horace usually thinks of imitation as copying what is already created (the common analogy or poetry is with the copy that painting or sculpture makes of a visible object). Moreover, the endless discipline of the schools in marking and reexamining the beauties of their standard texts gave a further thrust to that inescapable tendency of all schools to turn life into contents of books. Often enough imitation comes to be spoken of not as a representation of life but simply as an imitation of life in books – a copying of old authors. (1965:48)

It is true that Horace's strong emphasis on the studying of previous masterpieces seems to have overshadowed his idea of *mimesis* as representation of life. However, to conclude that he has "nothing definite to say" about how poetry should imitate life fails to do Horace full justice. Although this is not a place to discuss the complimentary relationship between Horace's theory of imitation in the rhetorical sense and imitation as representation of life, we should, I think, bear in mind that in spite of the importance he attached to the rhetorical sense of *mimesis*, Horace continued to emphasize the idea that poetry should be an imitation of life. For Horace, as well as other Graeco-Roman writers, such as Longinus[7], the poet should imitate the ancient masters for greatness of expression

and thought, but his poem, as an art work, should still imitate life and be a "truthful" representation of it. The two senses of *mimesis* should not be viewed as antagonistic to each other; nor would one diminish the other. As a matter of fact, the importance of imitating the ancients lies, in the final analysis, exactly in that it would help better imitate life. Therefore, it is, perhaps, not completely fitting to suggest, as McKeon does, that "the dictum of Aristotle, that art imitates nature, has suffered a like degradation with the transformation of the word 'imitation'" (1952:171). We should not confuse the two senses of the concept in Horace and discuss them in the same breath.

Nor should we allow the fact that Horace had little to say, explicitly or systematically, about the mimetic relation between poetry and life cloud our judgement on his whole theory. Horace was himself a poet and when he came to discuss the art of poetry, such as in his epistles, it is only natural for him to concentrate on the how, instead of the "what" aspects of the literary processes. His most important writing on the art of poetry is not a treatise, but a poem to a friend and his sons. A systematic investigation into the nature of poetry, like that of Aristotle's *Poetics*, was not his major concern, nor did he need to delve into the nature of *mimesis*, as Plato did, in order to prove or disapprove the credibility of the poets. His primary concern was to offer practical advice on the art of creating lasting literary works to the Pisos who shared, at least, the basic assumption that the nature of poetry lies in its imitation of life. Horace's whole theory can be said to have been based upon this very assumption, which he either directly or indirectly inherits from Aristotle.

However, Horace seems to have given the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis* a pragmatic and rhetorical twist. By "a rhetorical twist," I do not mean what critics like

Boyd and McKeon, as already mentioned, suggested, that is, imitation of the works of former masters. The influence of rhetoric on Horace's idea of the nature of poetry seems to have come from the rhetorical demand that the speaker delivers speeches that are rational and convincing, aiming at persuasion. While Aristotle discusses poetry as an autonomous area, Horace, due to his rhetorical and pragmatic inclination, seems to be more interested in how poetry communicates to its audience and how it functions in society. Let us examine some of the key passages from his *Ars Poetics* to find out what Horace's concept of *mimesis* as representation of life is and how his rhetorical and pragmatic rootedness have helped shape his theory of it. The natural place to start is from the very first passage of the poem:

> If a painter were willing to join a horse's neck to a human head and spread on multicolored feathers, with different parts of the body brought in from anywhere and everywhere, so that what starts out above as a beautiful woman ends up horribly as a black fish, could you my friends, ... hold back your laughter? Believe me, dear Pisos, that very similar to such a painting would be a literary work in which meaningless images are fashioned, like the dreams of someone who is mentally ill, so that neither the foot nor the head can be attributed to a single form. (*AP*, L1-12[8])

Almost every commentator of Horace agrees that this passage and the few lines that follow mainly concentrates on the principle of organic unity of a literary work. This is no doubt an important aspect of the above passage. But we may push our understanding of the passage a step further by asking, in the spirit of Leon Golden and O. B. Hardison, Jr. (1995): what is Horace's standard in judging whether a poem is organically unified or not? And how Horace proposes to achieve poetic unity?

The answer to the first question, Golden and Hardison suggest, would be that a poem is unified if it avoids "unnatural combinations and ornamental digressions" (42). By

"ornamental digressions," Golden and Hardison refer to Horace's example of the "purple patches," which is a violation against the rules of art. "Unnatural combinations" refers to what Horace describes in the passage quoted above: a human head on the neck of a horse, a beautiful woman joined with a black fish. Such pictures, or literary descriptions are "unnatural" because they violate "conditions that occur in the real world (nature)" (Hardison 42) and are therefore lower than reason. Therefore, as Golden and Hardison observes, "[i]n addition to calling for unity, the opening passage of the *Art* implies that the poet should stick to the real world – that is, nature" (43). But how should or could the poet stick to the real world? The answer to this question lies in the answer to the second question that we asked a moment ago, that is, "how is unity achieved?" So let us first have a look at Horace's idea of unity and how it differs from that of Aristotle.

Horace, like Aristotle, emphasizes the essential importance of organic unity of a literary work. However, from the above passage we can see that his reason for such emphasis seems different from that of Aristotle. While Aristotle chiefly thinks of unity in terms of "action" and his demand of unity is mostly based on the need of constructing a unified plot according to probability and inevitability, Horace's concern seems to be the convincing effect of the poem, or the impression of verisimilitude, upon the reader. Therefore, while Aristotle applied the principle of unity chiefly to drama and epic, Horace expands it to poetry in general: in the passage quoted above, for example, Horace emphasizes unity without linking it to any specific genre; only in the middle of the poem when he emphasizes unity again does he echo the Aristotelian demand. When commenting on Horace's inculcation of the organic unity, Atkins concludes that Horace's unity means a unity of parts, vitally connected and structurally related, such as

was to be found in Nature's organisms. Otherwise the resulting poem would be meaningless and absurd; as absurd..., as a distorted picture, or those monstrous visions that come to sick men in their dreams" (1961:79). Golden and Hardison basically share the same idea. They hold that although Horace's principle of unity shares some similarity with that of Aristotle, they are significantly different: Horace discusses the unity of poetry, especially in the first part of the *Ars,* basically through the analogy of painting. This sustained comparison echoes Horace's later claim that "a poem is like a picture" (*AP*, L361). "A poet who believes poetry is like painting will," as Hardison and Golden rightly pointed out, "think of 'imitation' in terms of verbal descriptions of things that exist in the world rather than action, and description is exactly what the examples given in lines 1-23 suggest the speaker has in mind" (1995:45). Again, unity, as advocated here in the first twenty lines of the *Ars*, mainly emphasizes the unified effect that gives the audience the impression of being natural, reasonable, just as "found in Nature's organisms." Consequently, to achieve this, the poet has one of two ways at his disposal: either by the "imitation of things as they are" in nature, which is always unified or "by the application of reason to composition ... to 'fit together' things that are not found in nature" and make them appear to be natural (Hardison & Golden, 1995:45).

From the first passage of the poem, we can discern the first possible meaning of mimesis in Horace's theory: that is, imitation of things as found in nature or things made according to natural principles. But Horace is essentially a pragmatist with a strong moralistic tendency in his approach to poetry. Mere descriptions of things as found in nature are not good enough for him. He advises that:

> He who has learned what he owes to his country, what he owes to his friends, by what kind of love a parent, a brother, or a guest should be honored, what is the duty of a senator, what is the function of a judge, what is the role of a general sent into war – he, assuredly, knows how to represent what is appropriate for each character. I bid the artist, trained in representation, to reflect on exemplars of life and character and to bring us living voices from that source. (*A.P.* L311-319)

It is clear that Horace thought that poetry should respect the examples of life as the source of subject matter. The object of literary representation should be of immediate moral and political concern. When commenting on this passage, C. O. Brink remarks that "by these [great] subjects he [Horace] denotes matters of common concern, personal, moral, political" (1963:214). This echoes McKeon's claim that Horace has reduced literary imitation to "reflecting actual conditions and customs" (1952:174) of contemporary society. Or in Horace's own words, as Brink paraphrased, "the poet has been trained to represent life and manners; he is a doctus imitator" (A.P L317-8, Brink 233). It is also clear that "represent what is appropriate for each character" has been promoted to a more prominent place in Horace's theory than Aristotle assigned to it in the *Poetics.* Therefore, it seems that in place of the Aristotelian emphasis of *mimesis* as plot-making, Horace has added *mimesis* as character-drawing and representation of contemporary life and manners. This twist that Horace gave to imitation is largely due to the importance of moral values and the social efficacy he attached to poetry.

It has been universally acknowledged that in Horace's theoretical system, the law of propriety or decorum is of ultimate importance: "it constitutes for Horace a guiding and dominating principle which runs like an undertone throughout the *Ars Poetica*" (Atkins, 1961:89). It applies to every aspect of the literary process: the form, expression, and choice of subject, characterization. When applied to characterization, it is the principle of

decorum which best reveals Horace's concept of *mimesis* as representation of life. We have seen from the last quotation how Horace promoted appropriateness in character-drawing from a position of secondary importance in the Aristotelian theoretical system to a much more prominent position. According to Atkins, the "[m]ost significant of all [among Horace's contributions to literary theory] is the stress laid by Horace on the Aristotelian demand for verisimilitude in character-drawing, and in particular, for qualities to be assigned to the various characters which should be in keeping with their respective ages" (1961:87). A question then follows: what is appropriate or decorous representation of character? And appropriate according to what scale of values?

Horace's answer is, first, that a character is appropriately drawn if it is represented according to the general traits that are suitable to his age. Horace then presents a detailed list of related character traits that are associated with each of the four major character types, namely, young children, beardless youth, mature man and old people. He urges the poet to take note of and carefully study "the characteristics of each stage of life" and "grant what is appropriate to changing nature and ages," so that he can always be sure that "roles appropriate for old men are not assigned to the young and those designed for mature men are not given to children." (L153-189). In Golden and Hardison's words, Horace is here demanding that characterization be "based on 'gifts of nature.'" (1995:60). These "gifts of nature" are basically general and typical traits that everybody at that stage of life displays. However, to depict a character only according to such traits is obviously not enough. Therefore, Horace, in another place (L153-178), advises that a character should behave and speak in a manner that fits well his individual status. Horace

maintains that the character of any person is necessarily decided by two factors: first nature; second, fortune, that is, chance circumstance. He believes that "Nature first forms us within so as to respond to every kind of fortune" (L110). One's age belongs to the "gifts of nature" as mentioned a moment ago, because everybody goes through all the stages alike. The characteristics do not vary according to person or circumstance. On the other hand, one's social status, wealth, and even temperament are individual and may vary according to circumstances; thus they belong to the "gifts of fortune." A character has to speak and act appropriately in terms of both factors to appear convincing and moving to the reader:

> If, however, there is discord between the words spoken and the fortune of the speaker, Romans, whether cavalry or infantry, will raise their voices in a raucous belly laugh. (L112-3)

The following passage reveals the same spirit, only Horace seems to have raised accuracy in character-drawing to an even higher importance:

> Sometimes a tale that lacks stylistic elegance, grandeur, and skill but is adorned with impressive passage and characters who are accurately drawn is a greater source of pleasure and better holds the interest of an audience than verses that lack a vision of reality and are mere trifles to charm the ear. *(AP*, L320-22)

It is perhaps claims like these from Horace that made modern scholars, McKeon for one, conclude that in Roman critics such as Horace, "the plot had lost the central importance it had for Aristotle," and as a result, "imitation is of persons, actions, and things" (McKeon, 1952:172), instead of "imitation of an action" as in Aristotle.

One more thing that we should note from the above passages is Horace's stress on the importance of the audience/reader's response. Horace's special attention to the audience is, as we mentioned earlier, due partly to the rhetorical tradition and partly to

the pragmatic doctrine that poetry should "speak words that are both pleasing and useful for our lives" (*AP*, L433). He claims that "[h]e gets every vote who combines the useful with the pleasant, and who, at the same time he pleases the reader, also instructs him" (*AP*, L345-6). Horace's idea of imitation is largely the natural consequence of this strong pragmatic tendency. In order to please, a poem should be made close to the truth, or in Horace's own words, "[i]n order to please, poetic fictions should approximate reality… nor should it extract a living child from the stomach of the ogress, Lamia, after she has just dined" (*AP*, L333). And in order to teach, poetry has to concern contemporary society from which source models for the literary representations of exemplars of life and character are drawn.

IV. Sidney: Mimesis of the Idea and Fore-Conceit

So far we have looked at the three major theories of *mimesis* in Greek and Roman Classicism. Although these theories continued to exert their influences side by side with each other during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, their sharp difference seems to have been softened: Plato's hostility toward poetry is softened by the neo-Platonists; Aristotle's *Poetics* got lost for quite a few centuries and his theories of literature were couched in the doctrines of Horace. There was a tendency during these periods to amalgamate all the three theories of *mimesis*. The coming together of these theories is nowhere more clearly seen than in Sidney's *Apology of Poesy*. Therefore, Sidney naturally becomes our next thinker to consider. However, our interest in him lies not in the *Apology* "as a compendium of Renaissance aesthetic commonplaces" (Ulreich, 135), but in the new direction into which it develops the concept of *mimesis*.

Modern critics are widely divided in their opinion as to what exactly is Sidney's notion of *mimesis*. Some have argued that Sidney, in making imitation the essence of poetry, shows himself fundamentally as an Aristotelian.[9] Others claim that Sidney advocates or at least implies a Platonic concept of *mimesis*.[10] Still others, Ulreich (147) for one, argue for a dynamic synthesis of Aristotelian and Platonic ideas in Sidney's concept of mimesis. I personally sense that Ulreich's interpretation is perhaps the best among the three. However, there is a fourth opinion proposed by David Daiches, which I think we should first address before we can start our serious discussion on how Sidney has synthesized the theories of Plato and Aristotle and how he differs from them. While most modern scholars agree that Sidney regards poetry as *mimesis*, Daiches suggests that in Sidney's theory, "the poet does not imitate or represent or express or discuss things which already exist: he invents new things." That is, Sidney seems to have rejected the idea of a mimetic relation between poetry and the world completely; instead, imitation in his system means that poetry, being a golden world, serves as a model for the readers to imitate. This, Daiches insists, is Sidney's development of the concept of imitation: "The poet does not imitate but creates: *it is the reader who imitates what the poet creates*" (56). Daiches seems to have interpreted Sidney's "golden" world as having nothing to do with the real world in which we actually live. He remarks that to Sidney, "imagination does not give us insight into reality, but an alternative to reality… He almost proceeds to develop a theory of 'ideal imitation,' the notion that the poet imitates not the mere appearances of actuality but the hidden reality behind them, but stops short of this to maintain the more naïve theory that the poet creates a better world than the one we actually live in" (58). We will come back later to the role of the poet's imagination in

creating the "golden" world and the relation between this world and the real world. Let us first consider whether it is true that Sidney has rejected the idea of a mimetic relation between poetry and world.

First of all, it appears that Daiches has a very superficial understanding of the concept of *mimesis* in his aforementioned claims. We have seen from Aristotle, as well as Horace, that poetry as *mimesis* does not have to "imitate or represent … things which already exist" (Daiches, 56). As a matter of fact, we will recall that Aristotle has emphasized that the best poems have never imitated or represented things as they are or were. Daiches's notion of *mimesis* reminds me of the following claim of A. W. Schlegel's remarks on the question of art as imitation of nature:

> As Nature is already present and available, it's a little hard to understand why one should go to the trouble of bringing a second precisely similar version of it into being as art…
>
> There have been some, however, who, realizing how vague and broad this principle is, have … declared that art ought to imitate *la belle nature* … But this gets us nowhere: either one imitates nature as one finds it, in which case it may well turn out not to be beautiful, or one re-creates nature as beautiful, in which case there can no longer be any question of imitation." (Schlegel, ii. 84) [11]

It seems as if copying existing things exactly as they are was the only possible meaning of *mimesis*. However, Sidney no doubt does not have this notion of *mimesis* in mind when he declares that

> Poesy therefore is an art of imitation for so Aristotle termeth it in this word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight. (*Apology*, 18[12])

Sidney's definition of poetry here shows him firmly in the classical tradition as far as his theory on the nature of poetry is concerned. He agrees with Aristotle that "imitation is the

essence of poetry. This is Sidney's thesis" (Shepherd, 50). Like Aristotle, Sidney does not view *mimesis* as the historian's kind of recording or producing resemblance of appearances as the mirror in the eyes of Plato. *Mimesis* is "representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth," that is, making fiction. Sidney further classifies poetic imitation into "three several kinds:"

1. Those "that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God." Examples he provides of this category include: the Psalms of David, Song of Songs of Solomon, Moses and Deborah in their Hymns and the writer of Job, Home in his Hymns.
2. Those "that deal with matters philosophical: either moral … or astronomical…or historical."
3. Those who "indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach.

Of the three kinds of imitation, especially of the latter two, Sidney thought the last the highest form of imitation. It differs from the second in the same way an excellent painter differs from the "the meaner sort of painters." While the latter counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, that is, the particular face that serves as the model of his painting, the more excellent "painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue" (*Apology,* 20). It is in this sense that the poet is superior to both the historian and the philosopher, because while "the one [philosopher] giveth the precept, and the other [historian] the example." (*Apology,* 25). Poetry is the moderator in the school of learning, for the poet "coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture, I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, or possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth" (*Apology,* 27). Poetry conveys the same truth, be it about "virtue, vices, matters of public policy or private government" (*Apology,* 28) or a single human emotion such as love, anger, as

philosophy, but through its "speaking picture," poetry gains more vivid comprehension and familiar insight of them.

In his idea of the position of poetry in comparison with the other human arts, Sidney shows much affinity to Aristotle too. However, while Aristotle places poetry in between history and philosophy, Sidney regards poetry as the "monarch" of all human sciences, which "doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it" (*Apology,* 38). As a consequence of his promotion of poetry above philosophy, Sidney's seems to emphasize the importance of representing abstract ideas, human virtues, emotions, for example, and tends to neglect the Aristotelian focus on the plot and action. He thinks that "it is that feigning *notable images* [italics added] of virtues, vices or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by" (*Apology,* 21). The most important aspect of poetry seems no longer action or the plot, but the "conceits" that the plot or character, or description illustrates so vividly and its ability in helping the reader better understand these "conceits." For example, Sophocles's Ajax lets the audience gain "more familiar insight into anger;" Oedipus the remorse of conscience, Achilles valor, Aeneas pietas (*Apology,* 28-9). The poet is "the right popular philosopher" who teaches general notions with particular examples (*Apology,* 30).

However, in creating the "perfect picture" (*Apology,* 27) which shows the outward appearances of such virtues, the poet "imitate[s] borrow[ing] nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be, but range only reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (*Apology,* 20). Again, Sidney, on the one hand, echoes the Aristotletelian idea that the poet is an imitator insofar as he is a maker;

on the other, he seems to have pushed Aristotle's theory a large step further by insisting that the poet, instead of basing his imitation on real objects and/or actions from the real world past, present or future, creates "another nature" from "[i]deas or fore-conceits" in his mind. Although Aristotle also argued that an artist could imitate things as they could or he thought they ought to be, did not reject the idea that art can imitate reality as it is as long as the imitation appears probable. To Aristotle, and much more to Johnson as we will soon see, the poet starts with the empirical world of particulars and works out a representation of the universal truth or the essential forms of things. Sidney's poet starts with the "[i]dea or fore-conceits" and ends up with illustrations of abstract ideas and general notions.

In this respect, Sidney seems to be quite under the influence of Plato. As various commentators of the *Apology*, Shepherd (1965) and Robinson (1972), for example, have demonstrated, the word "Idea," in Sidney's time, was understood as, for example in Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus,* a "figure conceived in Imagination, as it were a substance perpetual, peyng as paterne of all other sorte or kinde, as of one seale procedeth many printes so of one *Idea* of man procede many thousandes of men."[13] Based upon this definition, Robinson points out that Sidney's *Idea* "is a mental object, a generic concept which comprehends an abundant variety of particular objects in any class." And the concept of "fore-conceit" is "a thought or idea, acquired through external vision and perfected within the mind" (1972:110). If this is true, then Sidney's concept of *Idea* or *fore-conceit* reminds us of Plato's use of the word *Idea* or *Form*. To both of them, the *Idea* of a class of things/beings can only be one. However there are two important differences between them. First, while God is not only the originator of the Idea of things

but also the only agent whom Plato thought could grasp or have access to the Idea, Sidney grants the power of Creator to the poet as well. The poet "goeth hand in hand with nature" (*Apology, 14*) and is capable of doing what nature (or should we say God?) is capable of and may do a better job. Second, as a natural consequence of the first difference, Plato insists that the *Idea* of a thing, a bed, for example, is separate from any concrete instance of the thing. Therefore, the bed of the carpenter is only an imitation of the *Idea/Form* of bed and already once removed from the Idea or truth. The artist, as an imitator of an imitation is thrice removed from the real bed, that is, the Idea of bed. In Sidney's theory, the artist is not merely an imitator of the particulars or "appearances" of imitations of the Idea. Sidney, on the other hand, suggests, as Robinson puts it, that "the poet, like God, creates with general concepts [or Ideas], not external particulars, as his models"(Robinson, 17). The poet can perceive the Idea from a variety of particular objects of the same class and reach the truth or true nature of the class and form the Idea of it in his mind/imagination. Then if an artist can "translate this Idea or fore-conceit from his imagination into the words of a poem, then he will have produced a moral example superior to the specific or particular objects of external nature" (Robinson, 16). Thus, the Cyrus of a poet is not just "a particular excellency, as nature might have done," but an illustration of all the virtues of an ideal ruler, or simply, the Idea of an ideal ruler, which in turn will serve as a model to be imitated by real rulers" (Robinson, 16). The finished poem presents the "ground-plot" which is the concretization, in words, of the conceit or Idea in the mind of the poet. Sidney's emphasis on the vivid representation of "general notions" and his theory of the poet's "Idea or fore-conceit," however, should not be taken to mean that the poet creates a better nature purely, as Daiches would have

us believe, from his imagination. Sidney indeed claims that the poet is "not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit" (*Apology,* 14). Nevertheless, Sidney warns that the poet's "delivering forth" of the Ideas "is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air, but so far substantially it worketh" (*Apology,* 16). Sidney makes it very clear that "[t]here is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist" (*Apology,* 13). The difference between poetry and other arts lies in that while the other arts general depend on "what nature will have set forth" (*Apology,* 13), poetry is not "tied to such subjection," and instead, the poet "doth grow in effect another nature" (*Apology,* 14) in "imitation or fiction" (*Apology,* 16) of nature. Nevertheless, Sidney does suggest that the poet has first to comprehend somehow the divine patterns or Ideas which underlie the particulars set forth by nature and then create according to the Ideas or fore-conceits: the poet is "reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (*Apology, 20*). Although Sidney largely uses nature, in his *Apology*, in connection with its concrete manifestations, that is, the created world, he occasionally suggests a much broader concept of nature. According to Shepherd,

> in the sixteenth century… Nature was still thought of as the common mother of us all. It was also the creative and sustaining force in the universe. It was also the part of that force individuated in each man, a man's faculty or 'genius.' It was also the sum or a representative part of what was produced by the generating force in the universe. The concept of nature is then an amalgam of meanings, classical, Stoic, medieval, pagan, and Christian. (1965, 52)

That Sidney shares such a notion of nature can be discerned from his brief remarks on the art of metaphysic. He claims that the metaphysics build "the second and abstract

notions" "upon the depth of nature" (*Apology,* 14). This implies that the "Ideas or fore-conceits" of the poets, that is, "forms conceived in the mind," as Robinson observes, "are immanent in the natural world" (14). Because Sidney has so obviously promoted poetry over all other human learning, we sometimes tend to overlook Sidney's implicit theory of the relationship between poetry and other disciplines such as philosophy, history and metaphysics. If we give due attention to Sidney's claims such as "poetry is the right popular philosophy," "the poet is the moderator of history and philosophy," "the poet coupleth the general with the particular," we may agree that in the final analysis, the real difference between natural philosophy and moral philosophy, on the one hand and poetry, on the other, is not that the poet can perceive or learn the "divine consideration of what could or should be." Metaphysicians and philosophers can learn the "abstract notions" just as well as, if not better than, the poet. The title of "popular philosopher" suggests that both the philosophers and poets work on the same kind of abstract notions. Poetry is superior because the poet does not just stop at merely comprehending the ideas or forms that underlie the created world. He creates a fictional world according to these ideas and forms that he learned so that they can be made more easily and more pleasantly accessible to the common population. The poet can only "go[th] hand in hand with nature," not against or without nature; if the latter is the case, Sidney would never have praised poetry so highly, for as such poetry could never have served the grand purpose that Sidney thinks poetry has to serve.

A few words about Sidney's idea of the end of poetry are here perhaps in order. Sidney's idea on the end of poetry is most clearly manifested in the following passage, the first sentence of which we have earlier quoted:

> For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereto they are moved: which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them. (*Apology*, 20)

Sidney first repeats the Horatian formula of "to delight and teach," and then adds that it should move the reader. In spite of the seemingly three-fold function that Sidney proposes, the ultimate function of poetry as *mimesis* to Sidney, it seems, is only "to teach." As Sidney insists in another place (*Apology*, 20-22), "the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of." (*Apology*, 20). The means to achieve this final goal is to move the reader to virtue by way of delighting them. Therefore, to delight is only to teach more effectively, because poetry "delight[s] to move men to take that goodness in hand which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved" (*Apology*, 29). Moving is then viewed as "the cause and effect of teaching" (*Apology*, 37). Sidney's theory that poetry improves the audience morally by means of moving them to assimilate themselves to goodness and virtues is quite interesting from a comparative point of view. As we will see in the next chapters, the ancient Chinese had exactly the same idea about how poetry takes its effect upon the reader.

It has become clear, I hope, from our discussion so far, that Sidney's theory of *mimesis* has been shaped by those of Plato, Aristotle, and Horace. By insisting that the essence of poetry lies in *mimesis* as making of fiction, he is Aristotelian; in his concept of the "Idea or fore-conceit," he is obviously in line with the Platonic concept of the *Idea* or

Form of things. With regard to the function of *mimesis*, Sidney shows himself a descendent of Horace. However, he did not just accept his predecessors' ideas as they were. Sidney's mimesis, as Ulreich has convincingly argued, "is not a mere eclectic hybrid of contradictory definitions but an active synthesis of contrary conceptions in which Platonic and Aristotelian ideas interpenetrate" (147). Sidney has indeed developed "a kind of ideal imitation," which Daiches thinks Sidney failed to develop. Poetry does not aim at, although it could, the representation of the created world, but that of "abstract notions" hidden "in the depth of nature" (*Apology,* 14) through vivid particular examples.

V. Samuel Johnson: Just Representation of General Nature and Faithful Mirror of Life

Samuel Johnson has been credited as "the spokesman of his age," whose "superior command of language enabled him to say more strikingly and more memorably what his predecessors had said before him" (Arthur Sherbo, 60). Most striking and memorable of all that he said about literature is perhaps his claim that literature should aim at representing "general nature." Nowhere is this idea more clearly stated than in passages such as the following from his "Preface on Shakespeare":

> Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight a-while, by that novel of which the common satiety of life sends us all in question; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.
>
> Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life... His persons act and speak by the influence of those general

> passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species. (Preface to Shakespeare, 94-95)

At first glance, Johnson's notion of *mimesis* appears to be quite straightforward: "just representations of general nature," or "a faithful mirror of manners and of life." However, a more careful look at the above passage would imply that Johnson is not very consistent in his meaning of *mimesis,* for "a faithful mirror of manners and of life" is apparently contradictory to "just representation of general nature." It may be that Johnson is indeed, as is sometimes suggested by modern scholars, inconsistent in his literary theories and criticism, especially written at different times of his career as a literary critic. Yet to explain the apparent contradiction with inconsistency will lead us nowhere and to claim that Johnson is inconsistent in such a short passage is hardly doing justice to such a masterful mind. To solve the problem and get to the real meaning of the Johnsonian concept of *mimesis*, we will, first, have to answer a few important questions related to the above passage – questions such as: In what sense is Johnson employing the term "mirror?" Does the claim that a poet should hold "up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life" really indicate a literal sense of *mimesis* as Plato largely used the term and thus contradicts with the claim that poetry should be "just representations of general nature?" And what do such concepts as "nature," "generality," "truth" and "just representation" mean exactly?

First, the mirror. In his *Dictionary* Johnson gives the word "mirror" two definitions: 1) "a looking-glass; anything which exhibits representations of objects by reflection"; and 2) "pattern; for that on which the eye ought to be fixed; an exemplar; an archetype"

(*Dictionary*). In his various critical writings, Johnson has used the word in both senses in relation to literary representations. The sense of "a looking-glass" which shows the appearance of objects by reflection corresponds to the type of literal representation in literature and the second sense to the representation of life and nature through selection and generalization and even idealization according to human moral principles. Whenever the first sense is employed, however, it is employed in a derogatory sense. For example:

> It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art, to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation: greater care is still required in representing life, which is so often discoloured by passion, or deformed by wickedness. If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination. (*Rambler* No. 4, 37[14])

In this passage, Johnson is commenting on how the newly flourished novel of the eighteenth century should imitate nature [here he refers to the natural world only] and life. The term "mirror" is obviously used in the first and literal sense found in Johnson's *Dictionary* and Johnson does not care much about this kind of mirror in literature. Earlier in the same article, Johnson has observed that the tasks of writers of this new type of fiction require experience that "must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world," because "they are engaged in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can detect any deviation for exactness of resemblance" (Rambler No. 4, 36). Considered in isolation, such observations would indeed suggest that Johnson seems to have a literal sense of the concept of *mimesis* with regard to the new fictions. But Johnson immediately adds, "[B]ut the fear of not being approved as just copyer of human manners, is not the most important concern that an author of this sort

ought to have before him" (*Rambler* No. 4, 36). They should be first of all concerned that their imitation should be beneficial in shaping the character of the young readers, because the young readers, "not fixed by principle" (*Rambler* No. 4, 36), are likely to assimilate themselves to what they are exposed to. In this respect, Johnson appears similar to Plato. As a result of his pragmatic concern, Johnson would probably show little respect for the naturalistic kind of novel. As the way Johnson employs the word "mirror" in the above-quoted passage indicates, a faithful/just representation of nature and life that Johnson is after should not be understood as one produced in quick fashion, as Plato thinks the painters and poets do, by "tak[ing] a mirror and turn[ing] it round everywhere (*Republic*, X.596).

Johnson's faithful image of nature and life is, first of all, the result of a *selection* of experiences gained through direct and accurate observation and contemplation of the living world:

> The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is, that their authors are at liberty, tho' not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employ'd; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such a situation, as to display that lustre which before was buried among common stones. (*Rambler* No. 4, 37)

First, Johnson's idea that fiction writers are not at liberty "to invent" may appear odd, for how can a fiction be fiction without being first an invention. To understand this, we have to know that Johnson is using the word "invent" strictly in the sense of producing something "without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life" (*Rambler* No. 4, 36). When he thinks of "invention," he probably has in mind "the romances formerly written" by a writer who "had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his

invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities" (*Rambler* No. 4, 35-6). Literary fictions should give the impression of real life, and therefore, it should not "invent" out of pure imagination. This, however, does not mean that literary works are simply a literal copy of life, or that the writer does not engage his intelligence and creative power. The works of the best poets, Shakespeare, for example, always seems "scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation, and common occurrences" ("Preface on Shakespeare", 95). In imitating nature and life, the writer has to, to say the least, use his discretion in selecting details and events from real life. Literature has to appear to resemble real life and things in the natural world, but it is not enough to draw a character as it appears, "for many characters ought never to be drawn" (*Rambler* No. 4, 38).

Secondly, literary imitation is also, as the analogy of polishing a diamond suggests, an idealization of life. In another passage from the same Rambler article, Johnson makes this idea very clearly: "In Narratives, where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue" (*Rambler* No. 4, 38). Again, literary mimesis is viewed as fiction and historical verisimilitude is not a concern. However, Johnson's concept of "the most perfect idea of virtue" should not be comprehended as transcendental or even an abstract idea, as in the system of Sidney. This "most perfect idea" is "of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which may … teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform" (*Rambler* No. 4, 38). The poet can only idealize examples of life as far as it remains credible.

Thirdly, literary mimesis as a faithful image of life and nature is one that captures the general characteristics of natural objects and universal traits of human passions and the immutable patterns of human mutabilities.

> The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recal the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristicks which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness (*Rasselas*, Ch. 10, 133).

All these three senses of "a faithful representation" suggest the idea of a "pattern; for that on which the eye ought to be fixed; an exemplar; an archetype" (*Dictionary*). When Johnson claims that literature should be "the mirror of life" ("Preface to Shakespeare", 96), he is not demanding that literary works faithfully and literally copy life as found. Literary works are fictions that result from the selection, idealization and generalization on the part of the writer. They are faithful and just representations of life not that they "number the streaks of the tulip," as Imlac has figuratively put it, but that they are based upon the accurate observations of life; they are faithful to life because they are "not above probability" and therefore credible to the human mind; they are faithful also because they reveal "such prominent and striking features, as recal the original to every mind" (*Rasselas* ch. 10, 133), and "exhibit[ing] the real state of sublunary nature" ("Preface to Shakespeare", 96). It is in this very sense that we should understand Johnson's praise of Shakespeare as "the poet, that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and life" ("Preface to Shakespeare", 94-5). As such, Johnson's concept of "a faithful mirror" does not contradict his concept of "a just representation of general

nature." They are both pointing to the same direction; and we might even say that they are the same thing. To clarify this, a few words about the meaning of Johnson's "general nature" are perhaps in order here.

As Parker succinctly summarizes, there have been two general approaches, among modern scholars, to Johnson's concept of "generality": "the high road of ideality, where 'general' is taken to imply some kind of ideal order or the low road of empiricism, where 'general' implies the power to draw generalizations from the particularities of experience" (1989:21-22). While I agree that there is enough evidence in Johnson's writings to support both approaches, I think we should guard against two tendencies: to regard the "ideal order" or "general order" as a universal order on the transcendent and metaphysical level, on the one hand, and "generalization" as "abstraction," on the other.

One place in Johnson's writings where such a transcendental notion of "general nature" is suggested is found toward the end of Chapter 10 of *Rasselas*:

> He [the poet, or one who is aspired to becoming a poet, like Imlac himself] must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same: … He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place. (Rasselas, ch. 10, 33)

Imlac's aggrandization of the poet here indeed echoes the tone of Sidney's *Apology for Poesy* and anticipates that of Shelley in his *Defense of Poetry*. Imlac says all this mostly under the influence of his "enthusiastic fit" to aggrandize his own profession. What he says here has not only departed, as Stock suggests (1974, 131), from Johnson's position, but also from his own earlier position in the same chapter. Johnson, as is generally agreed among modern scholars, is essentially an empiricist, for whom "all mental action,

whether rational or imaginative, is always secondary to the direct experience of reality and is, apart from experience, seriously suspect" (Hagstrum, 7). A "neo-Platonic drive in literary theory" "would run strangely counter to the strongly skeptical and empirical tendency of his thought" (Parker, 22). That may be why Imalc's interlocutor, the prince, stopped him immediately: "Enough! Thou hast convinced me, that no human being can ever be a poet" (Chapter XI). Therefore, if "general nature" should be interpreted as any "general order" or "ideal order" at all, it should be in the sense, as proposed by Hagstrum, of "universal psychological truth" and "fundamental moral truths" (74). When general order is understood as such, the boundary between the high road and the low road would seem to collapse. Therefore, it may be unimportant to draw such a line at all.

However, be it understood as universal psychological and moral truth or "the general (and unchanging) principles of human experience" (Damrosch, 1976:24), general nature should not be viewed as existing in its abstract form in literary works. In other words, to Johnson, the poet does not work on the abstract level with any universal passions or general traits or types of characters. Critics such as Hagstrum tend to separate Johnson's general nature from the experienced world and insist that to Johnson, the concept of imitation has two aspects: "representing lifelike and particular reality, extensive in its range and various in its forms," and "representing ... moral and psychological truth" (Hagstrum, 71). Given Johnson's well-known harsh criticism of allegorical literature (*Lives*, I.185, I, 1.436-7, 3.233) and his reported remark that "I had rather see the portrait of a dog that I know, than all the allegorical paintings they can shew me in the world." (*John. Misc.* 2.15), it is hard to imagine that Johnson would endorse a representation of moral and psychological truth without its being first a lifelike representation of the

experienced reality. The reason that Johnson has conferred the highest praise upon Shakespeare is not just that Shakespeare's plays are "just representations of general nature," but also, if not more importantly, that "Shakespeare, whether life or nature be his subject, shews plainly, that he has seen with his own eyes; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind; the ignorant feel his representations to be just, and the learned see that they are compleat." ("Preface to Shakespeare", 110). To achieve a just representation of general nature, a poet, like Shakespeare, has to look "upon mankind with perspicacity, in the highest degree curious and attentive" (110). Shakespeare's characters are species and "will please many and please long" not that they are some kind of generalization of the particulars of a type of character, but because they are "the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find." (94). As Desai (55) points out, Johnson's emphasis is on "always." These characters stop being particular individuals because they will always appeal to readers of any time; and they can transcend, if this is the right word to use, time and place exactly because they are true to life, drawn from the poet's observation, not from some abstract concept, or generalized types. Therefore Parker has perhaps showed the most insight when he concludes that

> [w]hat Johnson finds in Shakespeare, as the context makes clear, is not so much the power to classify and typify individual particulars in a general form (as one might say that Falstaff is the type of all aging debauchees) but rather the power to perceive and preserve the general in the particular, to make us feel how Falstaff, in all his personal specificity, participates in the same human nature which we all share. (46)

Once we understand this, it will be easy to see how Johnson could maintain that literature is just representation of general nature and, at the same time, a faithful mirror of

life; we can also easily understand how, to Johnson, literary mimesis can be fiction and just copies of the experienced reality which calls to mind immediately the original in actual life. As John Boyd points out, "[f]or him [Johnson], the process of art in the last analysis is always looking to the complicated process of life for its source as well as its purpose"(296). "The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing" ("Preface to Shakespeare", 97). The poet, therefore, should have his feet firmly planted on the ground: he represents general nature, but should achieve it with "the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation" ("Life of Milton"); he produces fiction, but, since "[t]he human mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality," his fiction should "move[s], as a just picture of a real original; as representing to the auditor what he would himself feel, he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done" ("Preface to Shakespeare", 96).

VI. Mimesis as Description: the Pictorial and Ekphrastic Tradition

When Thomas Twining discussed the concept of *mimesis* as applied to poetry at the close of the eighteenth century, he found that "the word Imitation, … is used, sometimes, in a strict and proper sense, and sometimes in a sense more or less extended and improper" (2). It is used in its proper and strict sense when the resemblance is obvious and immediate, as when applied to the visual arts. Of the extended sense of the word, Twining found four different types in the Western literary tradition before him: sonorous, descriptive, fictive and personative. We have so far seen examples of the literal, the fictive as well as personative applications of the term: for example, Plato's

mimesis is more in the strict sense and also has a personative meaning; Aristotle, Horace, Sidney as well as Johnson employ the term mostly in its fictive meaning. Although Twining lists them as two distinct types of *mimesis*, sonorous, that is, onomatopoeic imitation is really a sub category of descriptive imitation: descriptions of sounds. Besides, this type of *mimesis* is perhaps the least important. Therefore, I will just skip it and concentrate on the descriptive kind in the next few pages.

Descriptive imitation, as defined by Twining, would include "not only that poetic landscape-painting which is *peculiarly* called descriptive poetry, but all such circumstantial and distinct representation as conveys to the mind a strong and clear idea of its objects, whether sensible or mental" (9). According to modern scholars such as Jean Hagstrum (1958) and James A. W. Heffernan (1993), Western literary descriptions fall into two major categories: pictoralism and ekphrasis. Both types aim at "generat[ing] in language effects similar to those created by pictures" (Heffernan, 3). What distinguishes them is that while pictorial descriptions "aim chiefly to represent natural objects and artifacts" (Heffernan, 3), ekphrasis refers to verbal representations of visual art objects, either real or imaginary. Although most modern scholars accept such a distinction, the term ekphrasis at the beginning of its long tradition, that is, the Hellenistic period, had been used in a more general sense to designate, as Krieger points out, "a verbal description of something, almost anything, in life or art." (1992:7). As such, it would include both the modern version of pictoralism and ekphrasis, and is thus roughly equivalent to Twining's descriptive type of imitation.

Ekphrasis, in both its general and narrow senses, has been a common practice in the West and is found from works of all ages: Homer's description of Achilles' shield,

Virgil's verbal representation of Aeneas's shield, Keats's Grecian Urn, for example. As a critical concept, ekphrasis was first made prominent and popular by the ancient teachers of rhetoric. The objective of literary description is to achieve in words what visual artists do with color and shape. According to Becker (1995), Aelius Theon, the author of the earliest extant rhetorical handbook from the first century A.D., defines ekphrasis as "[d]escriptive language bringing that which is being made manifest vividly before the sight" (Becker, 1995:25). Hermogenes of Tarsus, Aphithonius of Antioch, and Nikolaus of Myra, the authors of the other three early rhetorical handbooks, have all repeated the same definition with little variation[15]. Naturally, vividness (*enargeia)* and clarity (*sapheneia*) were considered by these great teachers as the most important qualities of ekphrasis. As Leach observes, "[i]n the verbal realm, the counterpart of verisimilitude is enargeia, or the achievement of persuasively lifelike description" (1988:7). Theon insists on the "vividness of almost seeing the things narrated" (Becker, 1995:27). Through his clear and vivid description, a writer strives to provide "unmediated access to visible phenomena" (Becker, 1995:25). The best description "turns listeners into viewers" (Becker, 1995:27) or our ears into our eyes (Krieger, 7), a theory that obviously had left a very deep impression, as we have seen earlier, upon Sir Philip Sidney.

Consequently, such a theory of ekphrasis demands not only that the description be faithful to the original, but also that the style "fit[s] subject matter." The ancient rhetorical teachers called for, as Becker puts it, that "the descriptive language [should] 'imitate completely the things being described" (1995:25-6). Theon, for instance insists that

> [i]t is necessary that the narrative [*apaggelian]* be entirely likened to the underlying things [the subjects], ...and that the style not be out of tune with their nature. (Becker, 1995:26)

The description should be objective and the style and form of description should draw least attention upon itself (non-self-reflexive) by matching the nature of the thing being described, so as to present a faithful and vivid representation that appeals persuasively to the emotions of the audience, an effect Quintilian highly recommended:

> What the Greeks call *φαντασῖαι* [phantasms] we call *visiones* [visualizations]; images by which the representations of absent objects are so distinctly represented to the mind, that we seem to see them with our eyes, and to have them before us. Whoever shall best conceive such images, will have greatest power in moving the feelings. (*Institutio*, 6.2.29)

For Longinus, one of "the Greeks" whom Quintilian is referring to here, visualization or *phantasia*, which he defines as "image-production," is one of the ways that leads to literary sublimity. The power of such "image-production" lies exactly, just as in the theory of Quintilian, in its ability to "bring it [the absent thing being described] visually before his audience." (*On Sublimity*, XV.1)[16].

Although since Lessing's *Laokoon*, critical attention has shifted unto the differentiation between painting and poetry not only in terms of their manners of imitation, but also on their proper objects of imitation, the basic assumption in the ekphrastic tradition still remains: that is, poetic description could and should achieve a pictorial vividness and graphical clarity so that to provide "unmediated access to visible phenomena" (Becker, 1995:25). Paul Friedlander (1912) claims that "true description is the representation of the surface appearance of work of visual art. And ekphrasis should try to represent, as faithfully as possible the visible features of a work." (Cited in Becker,

9). Literary *mimesis* in its descriptive sense suggests, indeed, an obvious and immediate resemblance as found in painting, and, therefore closest to Twining's definition of the "proper and strict" sense of the term.

Objectivity and faithfulness of a literary description, however, whether it is of visual art works, real objects or natural phenomena, obviously have their limits; and being faithful and objective does not suggest that the poet only stands aloof and describes the object as it appears. Very often the astonishing effects are enhanced by the describer's reaction and emotional involvement with the object described. From the time of the ancient rhetoric teachers on, ekphrasis has been treated, as Becker observes in his analysis of the ekphrastic theories as found in the ancient hand-books of rhetoric, not only "as a simple window to visible phenomena" but also "as a transformation of that phenomena through the language and the experience of the describer" (Becker, 24). In other words, the access that a literary description provides the reader-turned-viewer to the thing described is not entirely unmediated. Since the description is essentially "a transformation of that phenomena" described, it necessarily involves the active cognitive and often emotional participation on the part of the describer. In order for the describer to present a truly faithful and vivid picture of anything, he must first know the thing well, to say the least. If he wants his description to make vivid sense to his "viewers" and appeal strongly to their emotion, he must first make sense of it him/herself. Therefore, Becker concludes that "[e]kphrasis here is not to describe just the visible appearance of the work and the world it represents, but to include the judgments and emotions of the describer" (1995:28). Eleanor Windsor Leach (1988) shares this idea when she, in her discussion of the Shield of Achilles, claims that "the significance of the artifact resides in what Homer

makes of it, not in what it might be in itself," because Homer the poet acts "the double capacity of creator and audience to tell the listener not only what he sees but also what he hears and what he thinks" (13). Among the ancient literary theorists and critics, Longinus is perhaps the one who stated this idea in the clearest fashion. For Longinus, vivid description in oratory and poetry are slightly different, because while the former aims at clarity, the latter at astonishment. "Both, however, seek emotion and excitement." (*On Sublimity* , XV.2). As we have mentioned earlier, in his *On Sublimity,* Longinus defines visualization (*phantasia),* which Quintilian relates to the term visualization or vivid description in the Roman oratory tradition, as "image-production." He then continues to explain:

> The term *phantasia* is used generally for anything which in any way suggests a thought productive of speech; but the word has also come into fashion for the situation in which enthusiasm and emotion make the speaker *see* what he is saying and bring it *visually* before his audience. (*On Sublimity,* XV.1).

Furthermore, when commenting on a passage quoted from Euripides' lost *Pheaethon*, Longinus writes:

> May one not say that the writer's soul has mounted the chariot, has taken wing with the horses and shares the danger? Had it not been up among those heavenly bodies and moved in their course, he could never have visualized such things. (*On Sublimity*, XV.4)

What Longinus is trying to say in such passages is exactly what Becker has found out about ekphrasis from the ancient hand-books of rhetoric; that is, if the speaker or the poet want to vividly represent, to borrow a phrase from Sidney, a "perfect picture" (*AP, 27*) to his audience, s/he has to *"see"* it first in his or her own mind's eye. S/he has to open his or her whole heart and soul to what is being described, and

be emotionally involved with it and be agitated by its various aspects; essentially the poet has to identify with what he is trying to describe.

It is then clear that ekphrasis, in both its general and strict senses, is not only a vivid representation of an object, but also and at the same time an expression of the describer's reaction, both intellectual and emotional, toward the object. The real value of any literary description lies not so much in the faithful picture of the thing itself as in the fact that the description is "colored, by explicitly including a human experience of the observed phenomena" (Becker, 1995:30). We may, therefore, safely repeat with Johnson that "you can show me no passage where there is simply a description of material objects, without any admixture of moral notions, which produces such an effect" (*Life of Johnson*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1934-50, II. 86).

This chapter has been a long one. Unfortunately, however, the length is nowhere close to suggesting the real complexity of the concept of *mimesis* in its full development from antiquity to our present century. There are still more versions of the concept that we cannot cover than what we have in this chapter – the romantic version, the realist version, the naturalist version, the anthropological version of Girard, the Neo-Aristotelian version of the Chicago Critics, the Leibnizian possible worlds version of Doležel, to name just a few. Nevertheless, I do hope our discussion so far has revealed how the major versions of the concept before the nineteenth century differ and what they share, and therefore provided us with a somewhat comprehensive frame of reference for our discussion of Chinese poetics. There is however, one more aspect of Western *mimesis* that I would like to

emphasize before we can move on to the discussion of the Chinese side of our topic. That is, the role of the poet as an imitator. It is often assumed, as we mentioned in the Introduction of this dissertation[17], especially in the discussion on East-West comparative poetics, that in the mimetic tradition, the poet is always standing aloof from what he is trying to imitate. Since an imitation is of something objective, it would involve nothing of the subjectivity of the poet; otherwise, it would not count as an imitation. I would like to point out that there seems to be little ground for such an assumption. In none of the major theories of *mimesis* that we have discussed earlier is the poet viewed or advised to imitate in this manner.

Indeed, for Plato, for example, the poet's imitation is flawed by his perspective. He believes, as we have seen, that no one can imitate a thing as it is, because our view of anything is dependent of our position relative to it. Once we take a stand, our view is limited by our perspective; and since there is no way for a poet not take a stand, the poet can never be completely objective and reach the real truth. This is one of the major reasons why Plato denounces poetry. For Aristotle, the poet is only an imitator as far as he is both an interpreter and maker; for Horace and Johnson, mimesis involves the moral judgment of the poet; for Sidney, the poet imitates, not from some existing model at all, but directly from the "Idea or fore-conceit" that he forms in his/her mind.

These theories of *mimesis* not only call for the poet's active intellectual and cognitive participation and moral judgment, but also demand, very often, the emotional involvement of the poet. We have seen in the previous section that Longinus has advised that in order to draw a vivid and lively picture of anything, the

poet should bare his whole heart and soul to it, because to see a thing clearly in one's mind's eye and bring it visually before the audience needs the "enthusiasm and emotion" of the speaker toward the thing imitated. In such imitation, we not only see the object of imitation vividly presented; we feel the enthusiasm, thoughts, and emotions of the imitator as well. Such a demand is not, however, merely an addition to *mimesis* by Longinus. Aristotle, for example, had already stressed the necessity of *phantasia* and noticed the importance of the poet's ability to emotionally identify with the object of his imitation. In his *Poetics,* Aristotle makes it a "rule" that

> [i]n constructing the plot and working it out with the proper diction, the poet should place the scene, as far as possible, before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the utmost vividness, as if he were a spectator of the action (XVII).

And to capture this vivid visualization with words and transfer it to the audience,

> the poet should work out his play, to the best of his power, with appropriate gestures; for those who feel emotion are most convincing through natural sympathy with the characters they represent; and one who is agitated storms, one who is angry rages, with most lifelike reality. Hence poetry implies either a happy gift of nature or a strain of madness. In the one case a man can take the mode of any character; in the other, he is lifted out of his proper self (XVII).

The goal is to imitate "with the most lifelike reality;" but it is the poet's deep emotional involvement with the object of imitation that makes its achievement possible. During the Graeco-Roman period, due to the growing influence of oratory upon literary theory, the communication and didactic functions of poetry became more and more prominent. The poet not only imitates but also communicates. Consequently, critical attention shifted more and more to the thoughts, personality, and emotions of the poet. Again, Longinus has put this most clearly: "sublimity is

the echo of a noble mind" and "there is nothing so productive of grandeur as noble emotion in the right place" (*On Sublimity*, VIII.4). He regards greatness of thoughts and emotions as the first source of sublimity of poetry and oratory. Therefore, he advises that poets should "so far as possible, develop our minds in the direction of greatness and make them always pregnant with noble thoughts" (*On Sublimity*, IX.1). He believes that "[w]ords will be great if thoughts are weighty" (*On Sublimity*, IX.2). The cultivation of the poet's mind and personality is of utmost importance, because a poet, as well as orator, "whose thoughts and habits all their lives are trivial and servile cannot possibly produce anything admirable or worthy of eternity" (*On Sublimity*, IX.3). Horace seems to have the same idea in mind when he says that "[t]he foundation and source of literary excellence is wisdom" (*AP*, L309). For Horace, wisdom, as he explains a few lines later, consists mostly of moral judgement (*AP*, L309-322). Once a poet is equipped with superior moral judgement, he knows what subject matter to choose; and "once the subject matter has been provided, words will freely follow." (*AP*, L310). Moreover, since poetry, as oratory, is viewed as a means to delight and guide the listener's spirit, the poet, like the orator, has to be sincere in whatever he writes:

> As human faces laugh with those who are laughing, so they weep with those who are weeping. If you wish me to cry, you must first feel grief yourself, then your misfortunes … will injure me (AP, L99ff).

It is possible that Horace had got this idea from Aristotle, because it clearly echoes Aristotle's claim that "one who is agitated storms, one who is angry rages" (*Poetics*, VXII). It may be more likely, however, that it has been a natural growth out of Horace's

"to delight and benefit" formula of the function of poetry, for the principle of sincerity has always been a companion requirement of the latter.

Like Horace's "to delight and benefit" principle, the principle of sincerity had been prevalently accepted since Horace's time till that of Johnson. For Johnson, a work of art should be viewed not simply as an imitation of nature and life. More importantly, it is "an expression of the reality and nature that the poet had observed and contemplated," thus, also "a revelation of the powers of the author" (Hagstrum, 43).[18] The final significance of a work of art does not lie so much in the work as imitation of reality as such, as in its "psychological effects ... upon the reader" (Hagstrum, 43). Because of this strong emphasis on the communication of psychological and emotional truth, Johnson demanded much more emotional participation on the author's part than Aristotle, Horace and even Longinus had. Like these other great thinkers before him, Johnson "insisted that the artist must feel the emotion that he expressed and that there must be as little as possible in the work itself to interfere with the direct effectual communication of that emotion" (Hastrum, 44). Johnson can be, as often noted, rigid and naïve in applying the doctrine of sincerity. He would sometimes go so far as to refer to the author's biography to determine whether he has really experienced, in his real life, the emotions and sufferings he tries to convey in his works. The frequently cited example of this practice of Johnson's is found in the *Life of Hammond* where he writes:

> Of Cowley we are told by Barnes, who had means enough of information, that, whatever he may talk of his own inflammability and the variety of characters by which his heart was divided, he in reality was in love but once, and then never had resolution to tell his passion. This consideration cannot but abate, in some measure, the reader's esteem for the work and the author. (*Poets* II. 315)

In emphasizing the canon of sincerity, Johnson echoes not only its long tradition starting from Aristotle and the Graeco-Roman teachers of Rhetoric, but also the spirit of his age. Many authors and critics of the eighteenth century have uttered the same kind of strict demand on sincerity. Fielding, for example, has once written: "the author who will make me weep, says Horace, must first weep himself. In reality, no man can paint a distress well, which he doth not feel while he is painting it; nor do I doubt, but that the most pathetic and affecting scenes have been writ with tears"(*Tom Jones,* Book IX, Chapter 1).

This emphasis on the sincerity of emotions, however, expressed in the literary work and the need of the poet's experiencing the emotions expressed is essentially different from what we would call "expressive theory" of literature, which was popular with the Romantics. It may sound too naïve to repeat, after Hagstrum (47), that a theory which emphasizes, no matter how strongly, that literature should aim at the communication of human emotions and feelings does not necessarily make it an expressive theory of literature. Because the essential criteria for an expressive theory of literature lies not in the fact that it requires that literature communicate emotions and feelings, but in the nature of the emotions and feelings that it thinks literature should communicate. A literary theory may be called expressivist only if it requires that literature should communicate the subjective feelings and emotions of the author. Johnson's theory that literature should communicate "emotion selected and generalized into the simple universals that move all men everywhere" (Hagstrum, 47) is essentially different from an expressive demand. This, again, may be too obvious to restate. I mention it here simply because, as we will see in the later chapters, many scholars seem to have forgotten this

simple fact when they come to discuss and draw conclusions about the Chinese emphasis on the communication of emotions and feelings through literary works.

Notes

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[1] Page numbers of quotation from Johnson's Preface is based on *Johnson On Shakespeare*. Ed. R. W. Desai. (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979).

[2] Quotations from Plato, in this chapter, are all based on Benjamin Jowett's translation from *The Dialogue of Plato*. 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953). The number used here is not the page number but the division generally given in editions of Plato's works.

[3] Italics mine.

[4] This does not mean, however, that Aristotle does not regard poetry as ethically and educationally significant, only that he thinks the function of poetry in society should best be treated elsewhere, in the *Ethics*, and *Politics*, for example.

[5] All quotations from Aristotle's *Poetics* are based on Butcher's translation.

[6] Italics mine.

[7] As we know, the authorship of *On Sublimity* is still doubtful. However, for the sake of brevity and in keeping with the long standing tradition, I will use Longinus whenever I mean the author of *On Sublimity*.

[8] Quotations from Horace's *Ars Poetica* are based on O. B. Hardison, Jr., Golden, Leon. *Horace for Students of Literature*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995).

[9] Cf. Shepherd. "Introduction" to the *Apology*, 47. See also A. C. Hamilton, "Sidney's Idea of the 'Right Poet,'" *Comparative Literature*, 9 (1957):51-59; and D. H. Crag, "A Hybrid Growth: Sidney's Theory of Poetry in *An Apology for Poetry*," *Essential Articles for Study of Sir. Philip Sidney*. 113-135

[10] McIntyre, "Sidney's 'Golden World,'" *Comparative Literature*, 14 (1962), 363. See also Irene Samuel, "The Influence of Plato on Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*," Modern Language Quarterly, 1 (1940):383-92; F. Michael Krouse, "Plato and Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*," *Comparative Literature*, 6 (1954): 138-47.

[11] Quoted in Parker. 15.

[12] Page numbers of quotations of Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* are based on Sidney, Sir Philip. *An Apology for Poetry*. ed. Forrest. G. Robinson. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970).

[13] Quoted in Robinson, Forrest. G. Annotation. *An Apology for Poetry*. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970) 16.

[14] Page Number of quotations from *Rambler* and *Rasselas* are based on *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism*. Ed. R. D. Stock. London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1974.

[15] Cf. Becker, Andrew Sprague. *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, 25, footnote 44.

[16] Quotations from Longinus's *On Sublimity* are based Longinus. *On Sublimity*. Trans. D.A.Russel. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

[17] Also see my discussions, in chapter IV, on scholars such as Chen Liangyun and Wu Lifu's theories of a Chinese expressive theory of literary.

[18] For a detailed discussion on Johnson's theory of the relationship between author and the work of art, please refer to Chapter III, "Literature and the Author" in Hagstrum, Jean H. *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism*, (Minneapolis: The Unv. of Minnesota Press, 1952) 38-55.

Chapter 2

Chinese Mimetic Tendencies and Their Influences on Art Theories

Aristotle claimed, in his *Poetics*, that "Imitation is natural to man from childhood; he differs from the other animals in that he is the most imitative: the first things he learns come to him through imitation" (IV)[1]. Although, when he came to this conclusion, Aristotle probably had in mind only those peoples that he knew of, this theory certainly applies to the ancient Chinese as well. Toupounce (1980:360) has tried to prove that *mimesis* as a universal phenomenon was also evident in Ancient China from the Giardian anthropological perspective. His major argument is that the practice of using a scapegoat in the ritualistic sacrifice in Ancient China reveals a mimetic nature of these religious rituals. Unfortunately, Toupounce did not, for reasons that I have speculated about in the Introduction, investigate the concept of mimesis any further into the other aspects of ancient Chinese culture. Otherwise, his argument would have been accepted more widely, because the mimetic tendency was so evident in most major aspects of ancient Chinese life that it seems to be fundamental to the whole Chinese civilization. For example, the ethico-political philosophy of Confucius was based on a concept of imitation: the Great Sage Kings imitate the way of Heaven, the "little people" imitate the way of the kings, and the present kings imitate the way of the past, etc. The Daoist philosophy was also established upon the principle that "man model himself after Earth. Earth model itself after Heaven. Heaven model itself after Tao" (*Lao Zi*, XXV), which obviously reveals a chain of beings in a hierarchical order among which imitation rules the relation between the adjacent links. The Chinese writing system reveals, most evidently, the mimetic character of early Chinese people. Not only were the early Chinese characters essentially pictographic, the idea of such a pictographic writing system itself was, at least believed to be, an imitation of nature. The mimetic nature of

the writing system was crucial to the concept of Chinese literary and fine arts, because to the early Chinese, the writing system is the basis of literature, calligraphy as well as painting.

In this chapter, I propose to demonstrate the importance of mimesis in the ancient Chinese way of life by examining the Chinese mimetic tendencies in the following two areas: 1) the ancient Chinese concept of the order of the universe and its mimetic influence upon Chinese theories of art; 2) the mimetic tendencies in the *Book of Changes* and their impact upon later theories of Chinese literary arts and fine arts. I will concentrate on how the mimetic emphasis in these ancient theories influenced later literary and fine arts theories.

I. The Daoist Hierarchy of the Universe and Its Mimetic Implication

In the West, the universe has always been viewed as organized according to some hierarchical order. Plato, for example, as we have seen in the previous chapter, believed reality to be in a three-level hierarchy, on the topmost of which is "the true, transcendent and unchanging reality which lies beyond appearances" (Halliwell, 1988:7). This is the level, that is, the Form, which Plato called real, e.g. the real bed. God and only God functions on this level. No human being can reach it. Then there is the world of appearances, which is created by craftsmen by means of imitating the work of God. At the very bottom is the reality created by the painters and poets, which he called an imitation of imitation. The ancient Chinese philosophers also viewed the universe as hierarchically organized, but in a more evolved order. Such an order can be found in the classical texts of both the Confucian and Daoist schools, but the following passage from

Lao Zi's 老子 *Daode jing* 道德經 (*The Dao and Its Power*) is by far the best known and most influential:

> Therefore, *Dao* is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great and Man is also great. Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after *Dao* and *Dao* models itself after Nature. (XXV)[2]

To Lao Zi, there are four great "players" in the universe: Man (*ren* 人), Eartth (*di* 地), Heaven (*tian* 天) and *Dao* (道). Their order, according to their constancy, nameability, tangibility and originality, is as follows:

> Dao/Nature (Ziran 自然)
> Heaven
> Earth
> Man

On the very top, there is *Dao*, which was born prior to Heaven and Earth. It is always moving yet never changed. Lao Zi believed it to be the mother of all the things and beings under and including Heaven. This may be taken to be similar to the topmost level in Plato's metaphysical hierarchy, for they are both viewed as the true, transcendent and constant reality. However, Plato's Truth or Form seems to be a static concept and originated from another agent, God, while Lao Zi's *Dao* is the primordial and dynamic force constantly moving and constantly bringing other things into being. *Dao* seems to have come into existence all by itself, without a creator or originator, because Lao Zi claims that "I do not know whose son it is; it seems to be the ancestor of [all heavenly] kings." (*wu buzhi shui zhi zi, xiang di zhi xian* 吾不知誰之子，象帝之先) (*Lao Zi*, IV). *Dao* simply moves and acts as it naturally does (*Dao fa ziran* 道法自然). Although *Dao* has no model before it, it becomes the model for Heaven to imitate. Heaven in turn serves

as a model for Earth. Man is at the lowest level and should imitate the way of Earth. It is obvious that the relationship between the different levels in the hierarchy is one of imitation. In this respect, Lao Zi and Plato seem to share the same idea. As a result, in both the Daoist and Plato's schemas of the universe, the lowest level is the farthest removed from the Real.

However, there is an essential difference between the Chinese idea of man's relation to the Real (*Dao*) and that of Plato. While Plato insisted that agents on the lower levels cannot reach or even comprehend the constant and unchanging Truth and can only create images or apparitions of appearances, the Daoists believed that man, who occupies the lowest level in the universal hierarchy, can comprehend and may reach *Dao*. Firstly, in spite of his lower rank, man is acknowledged to be one of the *four greatest* in the universe. He is endowed with the gift to achieve what Heaven and Earth have achieved by modeling themselves after *Dao*. Secondly, although Lao Zi claims in the very first sentence of his five-thousand-word treatise that "the *Dao* that can be described is not the constant *Dao*; the name that can be named is not the constant name" (*Lao Zi*, I), *Dao* does not always operate in the transcendent, intangible and ungraspable manner. Lao Zi immediately added:

> *Wu* names the origin of Heave and Earth;
> *You* names the mother of the myriad things.
> (*Lao Zi*, I)

There are two levels or aspects of *Dao*: *wu* 無 and *you* 有. *Wu* refers to the transcendent and metaphysical level of *Dao*. The term *Wu* literally means "nothing" or "void." But Lao Zi does not mean that *Dao* on the transcendent level equals to nothing or nothingness. Lao Zi believed that its existence is real and absolute:

> *Dao* as a thing is impalpable, intangible. Although intangible and impalpable, there are images within it. Its images are formless, yet they contain substance. *Dao* is profound and obscure, there is essence within it. This essence is very genuine, and within it there is regularity. (*Lao Zi,* XXI21)[3]

Lao Zi employs the term *Wu* to describe *Dao* on the transcendent level simply because it is formless:

> That which cannot be seen by looking is called invisible. That which cannot be heard by listening is called silent. That which cannot be grasped by holding is called minute. These three qualities are unfathomable, hence they are looked upon as one; and [I shall] call it the form that is formless, [or] the insubstantial image. (*Lao Zi*, XIV)

In the mind of the early Chinese, "everything has its intrinsic form, and every form has its intrinsic name" (*wu gu you xing, xing gu you ming* 物固有形，形固有名) (*Guan Zi* 管子)[4]. Following this logic, we can only name things that we can see, touch or hear. Therefore, Lao Zi writes "*Dao* is invisible, therefore, it is without a name (*Dao yin wuming* 道隱無名)" (*Lao Zi* XI). The transcendent *Dao* is not only invisible, but also unhearable, and intagible. Yet at the same time, there is no doubt that it really exists. Therefore, Lao Zi uses a set of synonyms, *insubstantial substance* ("*wu wu* 無物,"), *formless form (wu zhuang zhi zhuang* 無狀之狀,) and *insubstantial image* (*wu wu zhi xiang* 無物之象*)* to describe *Dao*. Various critics and commentators have pointed out that by these synonyms, Lao Zi is referring to the concept of *Dao* on the transcendent and cosmic level. It is the primordial force before it was actualized.

However, the greatness of *Dao* lies in its power of producing the myriad things. Therefore, it cannot just stay in a stateless state or a formless form forever. Once it starts creating things, it becomes "*you* 有," that is, assumes actuality. That is why Lao Zi says

that "*you* names the mother of the myriad things" (*Lao Zi,* I). As Chen Guying 陳鼓應 aptly observes, "*you* and *wu* are two special terms in Lao Zi's philosophical system. They do not represent two opposites, nor are they contradictory to each other. … These two terms are simply other names for *Dao*. Together they represent the process through which the transcendent *Dao* actualizes and creates the myriad things in nature" (Chen Guying, 1991:6). When *Dao* is in its *wu* state, it is the primordial cosmic force. When it assumes actuality and becomes *you*, it stays with the thing created and becomes its innate nature and the natural law according to which the thing inevitably operates. In other words, it becomes the *Dao* of the thing, for instance, the *Dao* of Heaven, the *Dao* of Earth, the *Dao* of the Kings, the *Dao* of the oceans and rivers, etc. Although James Liu, as we will see later in this chapter, tends to admit only the transcendent and cosmic level of *Dao*, the fact that *Dao* has two levels has been widely accepted by modern Chinese scholars. Zhang Longxi 張隆溪, for example, in his well-known book, *The Dao and the Logos*, remarks that "[a]ccording to Lao Zi the philosopher, *Dao* is both immanent and transcendent" (1992:27). Cai Zhongxiang 蔡鐘翔 and Huan Baozhen 黃寶真 hold that

> the concept of *Dao* possesses two levels of meaning: First, it is the origin of the universe. Second, it refers to the probability and inevitability that governs the objective reality. … *Dao* is not only the metaphysical and transcendent law of the universe as a whole, it can also be in the form of the natural laws upon which concrete and individual objects operate. (987:45)

After a careful analysis of the various meanings of *Dao*, Chen Guying also concludes that "although *Dao* [on the transcendent level] is invisible and impossible to follow, when it takes its effects upon the myriad things in the universe, it reveals itself as the objective laws. These objective laws can be comprehended and used as the model for

human behaviors. Therefore, besides discussing *Dao* in the transcendent sense, many places throughout his book, Lao Zi also employed the term to mean *Dao* in the sense of objective laws" (1991:6-7).

Because of the tangibility of *Dao* as natural laws, when Lao Zi urges the kings to model themselves after *Dao*, he usually employs the term on this level. Examples abound in *Lao Zi* the book:

> Heaven and Earth cherish no feelings and treat the myriad things as [sacrificial] straw-dogs.
> The sages cherish no feelings and treat the people as [sacrificial] straw-dogs. (*Lao Zi,* V)

The *Dao* of Heaven and Earth is that they do not have any emotions toward the myriad things in nature. They provide for the myriad things but let them live or die as they naturally should. As a result, everything in nature thrives. Lao Zi urges the rulers to follow the model of Heaven and Earth and treat their people as sacrificial straw-dogs, that is, treat them without special emotions, neither love nor hatred. The rulers should let their people live as they naturally should. If a ruler could do this, his kingdom and people, Lao Zi believed, would surely be prosperous.

Here is another example where the ruler is urged to imitate Heaven and Earth:

> Heaven lasts long and the Earth lives long. The reason why Heaven and Earth can last long is because they do not try to elongate their own life.
> Therefore, the Sages put their own person after others, and as a result, they are always in the front. They treat their own body as something external, and as a result, their body lasts. Is it not exactly because they are selfless that they can achieve their selfishness? (*Lao Zi,* VII)

In this passage, Lao Zi observes another aspect of the nature, or *Dao*, of Heaven and Earth, that is, if we put it in modern terms, the lack of "self-awareness." Lao Zi notices as

a fact that Heaven and Earth last forever. The reason for this fact, he thinks, is because Heaven and Earth are not aware of their own life and therefore never consciously do anything to lengthen their own life. Therefore, he urges the ruler to forget his own person, just as Heaven and Earth are never aware of theirs.

By the above passages, Lao Zi is essentially advocating a *non-action* (*wuwei* 無為) life philosophy. The term *wuwei* has sometimes been erroneously understood, in A. C. Graham's translation (260), for example, as "doing nothing." What Lao Zi really means is that we should not take any action that is against the nature of things. Instead, we should act or allow other things or people to act as their own nature directs. The Daoists' *non-action* theory is a natural conclusion of a mimetic relationship between man and Nature: Man should follow the model of *Dao*, Heaven and Earth. Since *Dao*, Heaven and Earth created and provided for the myriad natural objects and creatures without a visible hand, man should act the same way: taking *non-actions*.

That *non-action* philosophy has its root in the Daoists' mimetic theory on the relationship between man and Nature, is also obvious in Lao Zi's greatest follower, Zhuang Zi 莊子(ca. 369 BCE – 286 BCE). Zhuang Zi puts it very clearly in *Zhi Bei You* 知北游 ("Knowledge Travels North"):

> Heaven and Earth possess great beauty, but they never talk [about it]. The four seasons possess bright laws, but they never brag about [them]. The myriad things in nature each has its own intrinsic principles, but they never speak [about them]. The Sages trace the beauty of Heaven and Earth and comprehend the principles of the myriad things. Therefore, the perfect man takes non-action; the great Sages do not create. It is simply because they are observant [of the *Dao*] of Heaven and Earth. (*Zhuang Zi* – "Knowledge Travels North")

Two interesting things we may notice in this passage: first, Zhuang Zi acknowledges that

Heaven and Earth (*tian di* 天地), the four seasons (*sishi* 四時) and the myriad natural things (*wanwu* 萬物) possess great beauty (*damei* 大美), bright laws (*mingfa* 明法) and their intrinsic principles (*chengli* 成理). These terms are simply other ways that Zhuang Zi employs to refer to *Dao*. We will come back to this point later, so let us get to the second point: Zhuang Zi seems to be pointing out that the immanent *Dao* can be grasped through observation and used as guidance for human behavior. Zhuang Zi maintains that a great sage (*dasheng* 大聖) or a perfect man (*zhiren* 至人) acts exactly as Heaven, Earth, the Four Seasons and the myriad things in nature. A great sage or perfect man can act this way because he is "observant of [the *Dao* of] the Heaven and Earth (*guan yu tiandi* 觀於天地)" and consequently is able to "trace the beauty of Heaven and Earth and comprehend the intrinsic principle of things in nature." Even Confucius, who is far more concerned with *Dao* on the level of human affairs, shared, to a great extent, the philosophical position, which Zhuang Zi proposes here. Although his students (*Analects* V.13) complained that he never discussed the *Dao* of Heaven with them, Confucius was often observant of the way of heaven and nature. He once told his students:

> "How I wish to remain silent!" the Master said.
> "If you, my Master, remain silent, what shall we have to record?" Zigong asked.
> The Master answered: "What does Heaven say? The four seasons pursue their own courses, and the myriad things are continually being produced; but does Heaven say anything?" (*The Analects* V.13)

As one commentator, Guo Xiang 郭象 (? – 312), pointed out, what Zhuang Zi is trying to say in the aforementioned passage is exactly what Confucius is trying to tell his students (Guo Qingfan, 735). Although Confucius as a fictional figure does not fare very well in the fables of the *Zhuang Zi*, interestingly enough, Confucius the historical figure

as seen on the above occasion surely fits well in Zhuang Zi's description of "a great sage" or "a perfect man," because Confucius, just like Zhuang Zi's "perfect man," constantly put Heaven and Earth in front of him and regarded them as perfect models to follow.

From the above examples, we can also see that when Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi give practical advice, they base their theory more upon *Dao* in the sense of natural laws than *Dao* in the transcendent and cosmic sense. The following example may help to make this point a bit clearer:

> The reason why the Rivers and the Seas can rule over the valleys is because they are good at taking a lower position. Consequently, they can be the rulers of the valleys.
>
> Therefore, the Sage wishing to rule over the people must remain humble in his words. Wishing to lead the people, he must put his own person behind theirs. (*Lao Zi,* LXVI)

We have seen that Lao Zi has urged the ruler to imitate the way of Heaven and Earth in the earlier chapters of his treatise. Here he discovers the *Dao* of the rivers and oceans and likewise advises the ruler to imitate them. Again he starts with the natural phenomenon that all brooks flow from the valleys into rivers and finally into the oceans because the rivers and oceans are in a lower geographical position. To Lao Zi, this is the *Dao* of the ocean and the rivers; and it should serve as a model for the rulers. If the oceans can rule the valleys and brooks by assuming a lower position, the rulers can also sit above his people without danger by acting humbly. As we can see, in all these examples, Lao Zi is more concerned with the immanent *Dao* than the transcendent *Dao*.

When it came to Zhuang Zi, the immanent *Dao* was emphasized to an even greater extent. When asked, by Dongguo Zi 東郭子, where *Dao* dwells, Zhuang Zi answered that it dwells everywhere. When urged to name a few places where *Dao* dwells, he says

that *Dao* exists in the ants, in the barnyard grass, in the rubbles and even in piss and shit (*Zhuang Zi* – "Knowledge Travels North"). So everything has its own intrinsic *Dao*. But what exactly is *Dao* according to Zhuang Zi? As Cai Zhongxiang and Huan Baozhen (1987:44) point out, Zhuang Zi explained *Dao* as "cannot be otherwise (*bu de bu ran* 不得不然)," that is, objective inevitability. For example, Zhuang Zi asks:

> Heaven cannot but be high. Earth cannot but be vast. The sun and moon cannot help but moving. The myriad things in nature cannot help but thriving. Is not this their *Dao*? (*Zhuang Zi* – "Knowledge Travels North")

That Heaven cannot help but being high, Earth cannot help but being vast, the sun and the moon cannot help but moving around all the time is not because there is some outside force propelling them to be so. These characteristics are simply their nature. In *Tian Zi Fan* 田子方, Zhuang Zi uses Heaven, Earth, the sun and moon again to illustrate the concept of *Dao*. Here we find Lao Zi and Confucius engaged in a conversation on self-cultivation. In and answer to Confucius's idea that a gentleman (*junz* 君子) should consciously cultivate his own person, Lao Zi says:

> No, not true! The limpidness of water is its natural state (*ziran* 自然), not something it obtains through deliberate actions. [Likewise,] the perfect man does not deliberately cultivate his virtue, yet nothing can take it away from him. [It is] just like the fact that Heaven is naturally high, that Earth is naturally deep, and that the sun and moon are naturally bright. What is there to be cultivated? (*Zhuang Zi* – "Tian Zi Fan")

From this passage, we can conclude that "cannot be otherwise" is also a synonym of *ziran*.

Ziran is a very important concept in the Daoist philosophy and has had great and far-reaching influence upon Chinese literary and fine arts theories. The term has

sometimes been translated with the English term "*spontaneity.*" But the real meaning of the term is much wider. *Ziran* is a compound word made up of two parts: *zi* and *ran*. *Zi* means self and *ran,* according to *Guangya-Shigu* 廣雅-釋詁 (*Guangya* – "Explanation of Ancient Characters"), means "coming into existence." (然，成也). So literally, *ziran* means "becoming what it is by itself" or "coming into its natural state by itself." This sense is obvious in both Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's discussions of man's relationship with *Dao*. In the above quotation, for example, Heaven becomes high, Earth becomes and remains vast, the sun and moon become bright all by themselves. From this literal sense, *ziran* also means the natural state of things: highness of heaven, vastness of earth, brightness of the sun and moon, limpidness of water, etc. Zhuang Zi sometimes also expresses this sense of *ziran* in the term of *tian* 天 (Heaven). "In Zhuang Zi's writings, *tian*, almost without exception, is used as a synonym of *ziran*" (Cai Zhongxian, 1987: 45). *Tian* in this sense, as has often been noted, pairs with *ren* 人(man) and forms a dichotomy with it (A. C. Graham, 1981:15-19, Cai Zhongxiang, 1987:45). Zhuang Zi explains *tian* in the following manner:

> The horse and ox have four legs. This is what we call *tian* 天. To put a harness around the head of a horse and a rope through the nose of an ox is what we call *ren* 人. (*Zhuang Zi* –"Autumn Water")

Therefore, *tian* or *ziran*, also means the natural state not yet touched in any way by conscious human effort. To Zhuang Zi human effort only introduces ugliness and trouble. A fable in the chapter of "Perfect Happiness" (*Zhi le*, 至樂) illustrates this point very well. This time, it is told by the fictional Confucius:

> Haven't you heard the story about the sea bird? Once upon a time, a bird from

> the sea came and stopped outside the city of Lu. The Lord of Lu welcomed it into his temple with the grand tune of *jiushao* (九韶) and treated it with royal feasts (*tailao* 太牢). The bird however was only dazzled and saddened. It dare not eat a piece of meat. It dare not drink a drop of water. In three days, the bird died. This is because the Lord of Lu fed the bird with his own favorite food, but not the bird's natural nutrition. (*Zhuang Zi* – "Perfect Happiness")

The bird, by its very nature, needs to "fly in the wood," "float over the rivers and lakes," "eat insects" (*Zhuang Zi,* Perfect Happiness*)*. It has to be able to do all these activities freely. To put it in the temple is, in essence, a restriction of its freedom. To treat it with human feasts is against its *tian*, that is, nature. *Jiushao* may be the best music and *tailao* the best food that men could ever dream of. But they are exactly what killed the bird. Therefore, Zhuang Zi advises that we should not destroy what is given by Nature with human effort (*wu yi ren mie tian* 以人灭天). Real beauty exists in the natural state of things. This point is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the following fable, which almost every Chinese knows:

> The beautiful Xi Shi, troubled with heart-pain, walked through her village with her eyebrows locked. An ugly girl of the neighborhood saw it. Thinking it beautiful, the ugly girl went home, and likewise frowned upon her neighbors and pounded upon her breast. But seeing her like this, the rich men of the neighborhood tightly shut their doors and refused to come out. The poor men simply took their wives and children and moved away. (*Zhuang Zi* – "The Turning of Heaven")

The frowning of Xishi's eyebrows is beautiful not because she was a beautiful girl but because it is a natural reaction to her heart-pain. By the same token, the wrinkling of the ugly girl's eyebrows is disgusting not because she is ugly to begin with, but because it is forced, therefore unnatural. Zhuang Zi employs the same principle in his discussion of the beauty of music. According to Ziqi子綦, another historical figure fictionalized and

used as a mouthpiece by Zhuang Zi, there are three kinds of music: the pipes of man (*renlai* 人籟), the pipes of earth (*tilai* 地籟) and the pipes of nature (*tianlai* 天籟). The music of man is that from the flutes and pipes made of bamboo. The music of earth is that from hollow places such as the holes in the trees, caves in the ground when blown by the winds. *Tianlai*, that is, the pipes of nature, has generally been translated into English as "pipes of Heaven" (Graham, 45-59). But *tian* in this context seems to be different from Heaven, as used by Lao Zi in "Man models himself after Earth and Earth models itself after Heaven." When commentating on the music of *tian*, Guo Xiang noted that "*tian* is the name that summarizes the myriad things (故天者，萬物之總名也);" and *ziran* means exactly *tianran* (自己而然，謂之天然) (Guo Qingfan, 50). Wang Shuzhi 王叔之, a Song dynasty scholar, after Guo Xiang, also remarked that "*tian* is a summary name for the myriad things; it is another name for *ziran*. Does it simply refer to the sky?" (夫天者，萬物之總名，自然之別稱，豈蒼蒼之謂哉？" (Guo Qingfan, 50). Therefore, to a great extent, *ziran* or *tianran* can even be loosely translated with the English word "nature" with all its meanings included. Since *tian* is simply another name for *ziran* and the myriad things in nature, Guoxiang, and Wang Shuzhi after him, believed that Zhuang Zi's term *tianlai* would encompass any sound that man or natural objects produce out of their nature. Modern scholars generally accept this explanation. For example, Cai Zhongxiang and Huang Baozhen interpret *tianlai as* "referring to natural sounds without being stimulated by any external forces" (1987:45). Yue Daiyun 樂黛雲, Ye Lang 葉朗 et al. explain it as "the self-generated sounds that the myriad things emit according to their own natural state" (Yue Daiyun, 1993:523). So *tianlai* may better be translated

simply as "pipes of nature."

Although in none of the above discussions is Zhuang Zi directly concerned with literature or fine arts, Zhuang Zi's theory on the dichotomy between *tian/ziran* and *ren*, and his theory of *Dao* as "cannot be otherwise" has led to a long history of Chinese aesthetics which prefers natural beauty to man-made beauty. As Cai Zhongxiang and Huang Baozhen observes, "the *ziran* theory [which started with Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi] has been developed, in the history of Chinese literary history, into a raging flood that was never dried" (1987:46). Throughout the dynasties, *ziran* had been held as the highest standard against which a work of art, be it painting, calligraphy, or literary writings, should be evaluated. But what are the requirements of the *ziran* theory? Zhao Zecheng et al. (1985:506), in their *A Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Literary Theories*, define the term as follows:

> The *ziran* style demands that the writer follow the objective laws, truthfully describe natural scenes or human affairs. The description should contain authentic feelings and emotions. In artistic techniques, it displays such characteristics as simplicity, freshness and naturalness, which betray no forced human effort. (1985:506)

Zhao Zecheng et al. seem to regard the *ziran* theory mainly as concerning "literary style." However, even from their above explanation of the "*ziran* style", we can see that the *ziran* theory, in essence, is far more than just a stylistic requirement. According to Cai Zhongxiang and Huang Baozhen (1987), the *ziran* theory when applied to art indicates three things. First, *ziran* means that literature, "although a man-made art, should hold Nature (*ziran*) as the model (*fanben* 范本) of beauty. This is what has been called [by Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837-908)] 'miraculously approximating nature (*miao zao ziran* 妙造

自然)'." Second, *ziran* means simple, plain and unadorned (*supu* 素樸). Third, *ziran* means "true and real, that is, literary works should retain the true state of the things [which they take as subject-matter] and avoid any falsehood" (1085:46-47). We can perhaps conveniently summarize these three meanings into two major aspects: one that defines a literary style and one that defines the relationship between art and Nature. These two aspects of the *ziran* theory, however, should not be understood as isolated from each other. The stylistic aspect of the theory is simply a natural extension of the demand that art be true to the nature of its subject matter. For example, the second meaning of *ziran,* i.e., simplicity and plainness (*supu*), apparently seems to be more of a requirement for literary style. However, it also describes the relationship between artwork and its subject matter. To be simple and plain does not mean coarse. As we mentioned earlier, the only perfect beauty, to Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi and later Chinese writers and artists under their influence for that matter, lies in the natural/innate state of things. To represent this perfect beauty in any human art form would demand that the artistic style match the innate nature of the things depicted. Ornamental language and an embellished style, just like coloring the feathers of a bird, as we Chinese love to repeat, achieves nothing but spoiling the natural beauty of the feathers. The impression that the final work gives the reader/viewer should be natural, as if grown all by itself without a trace of human effort. Such a perfect beauty has usually been described by the term *ziran,* or *tianlai,* both of which have obviously been borrowed from Zhuang Zi's categories. *Ziran* in this sense becomes, therefore, not simply a stylistic evaluation but an evaluation of the work as a whole as well.

As part of the *ziran* theory in Chinese art history, the dichotomy of *tian* and *ren* in

Zhuang Zi's philosophical system was also developed into the antithetical pair of *tiangong* 天工 (or *huagong* 化工)[5] and *huagong* 畫工 and widely employed to judge the esthetic value of an artwork. Yue Daiyue, et al., define *tiangong* as "the natural beauty of the myriad things in the universe" and *huagong* 畫工 as "the beauty created by human artistic skills" (1993: 215). Such a definition is very close but not exact. The word *gong* originally means a person with special techniques, a painter, weaver, wheel-wright, for example. When used in *tiangong, huagong*, it acquired a meaning similar to the Greek term *techne* as employed by Aristotle. It refers to the artistic ability and skills of an artist as displayed in his art works. Therefore, I am more inclined to accept Zhao Zecheng's understanding of the terms (1985:583): *Tiangong* refers to the ability and skill with which *tian/Dao* produces the myriad things in nature; and *huagong*, literally the artistic power and skills of a painter, refers to the skills with which the artists create human art works. The difference between *tiangong* and *huagong* lies in that, as Yue Daiyun et al. point out (1993:215), while the former is real and natural (*zhenshi ziran* 真實自然), the latter betrays traces of deliberate effort.

Between *tiangong* and *huagong*, traditional Chinese writers have generally held the former as the higher state of artistic achievement. Although to reach *tiangong* sounds humanly impossible, traditional Chinese writers had always set it their goal to deliver art works that appeal to the reader/viewer as if created by Nature or some demonic agents (*guifu shengong* 鬼斧神工), instead of human hands. Many writers could not help but sighing, with the Tang poet, Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813-858) that they had to "give up in front of the skills of Nature" (*tulao ran huagong* 徒勞讓化工) ("In Dedication to Du

Pushe" 獻上社僕射相公). As the great poet, Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210) claims, "literary writing was essentially created by Nature, only the skillful hands could occasionally come by it" ("Literary Writing" 文章). So the general attitude is to "respect nature as the master and model (*yi zaowu weshi* 以造物為師)" and "paint what *tian* has created (*tian zhi suo sheng ji wu zhi suo hua* 天之所生即吾之所畫)" (鄭板橋 Zheng Banqiao (1693-1765), "On Painting" 題畫)[6]. However, this is not a slavish relationship. As we will see in the fourth chapter of this paper, a passive, superficial copy of natural objects had always been regarded, just as in the West, as worthless by traditional Chinese writers and artists. We recall that from the time of Lao Zi, true beauty lies in the revelation of the true nature of things in a plain style. The most important quality of an artwork, therefore, lies in its truthful representation of the intrinsic principles, instead of the appearance, of the world. We have seen that Sikong Tu advocated that the best poetry should "miraculously approximate nature." The famous Tang landscape poet, Wang Wei 王維 (699-759) also observes in his *The Secrets of Landscape Painting* (山水畫訣) that

> among the different styles of painting, Ink and Water is the best. [It] follows the way of Nature and obtains the achievement of that which created the natural world [*zaohua* 造化]. On a painting of ten inches, [it could] paint the scenery of thousands of miles. The east, west, south and north appear as if really in front of your eyes. The spring, summer, autumn and winter all come to life under the brush. (Shen Zizheng, 1982:30)

There is no mistake that the central message of this passage is that the best painting should represent nature in such a way that they appear as real and alive on paper as in the real world. And in order to achieve such a perfect representation, the painter has to "follow the way of Nature." To represent natural scenery in such a lively and vivid

manner, the painter has to understand the true nature of the things that he paints.

The Chinese had never had an idea similar to that of Plato when he claims that a painter cannot reach the truth and therefore is only capable of representing the appearances. From the very beginning, Chinese philosophers and artists had believed that one could reach the truth by using one's heart (*xin* 心). Artistic creation is a bipartite process: "From without, learn from Nature; from within, reach the sources of the heart (外師造化，中得心源)" (Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远, "Famous Paintings of All Dynasties 歷代名畫記"). Therefore, the best footnote to the Chinese idea on the relationship between art and nature is perhaps from Qian Zhongshu 钱锺書, when he claims, in his short article "To Imitate Nature and to Beautify Nature," that "the coming into being of any art can be said to be the result of a marriage between *tian* and *ren*" (1992:91). To reach the highest perfection in his artistic creation of a natural object, for example, the artist has to actively process what the eyes can see and contemplate what the eyes cannot see of the object with his heart. When the time comes to actually create the artwork, the object should not just be in front of the eyes; it should already be living in the artist's *lingfu* 靈府 (literally, where the soul dwells). This theory is very well illustrated in Zhuang Zi's fable of the famous Engraver Qing:

> Engraver Qing chipped wood to make a bellstand. When the bellstand was finished viewers were amazed, as though it were made by a spirit or ghost. The Marquis of Lu summoned him and asked him:
>
> "By what secret did you make it?"
>
> "Your servant is a mere artisan, what secret could he have? However, there is one point. When I am going to make a bellstand I take care never to waste any of my energy [qi]. I make sure to fast to still the heart. After fasting three days, I forget thoughts of reward, honors or salary. After fasting for five days, I do not care to think of any criticism or praises, or my skills or clumsiness. After fasting

for seven days, I am so intent that I forget that I have a body and four limbs.

"At this point, my lord's court does not exist for me. The dexterity for it concentrates, outside distractions melt away, and only then do I go into the mountain forest and observe the true nature (*tian* 天) [of things in the forest]. I will find the wood that has the best shape [for the bellstand][7]; then I try to have a complete vision of the bellstand; only then do I put my hand to it. Otherwise, I give the whole thing up. In doing so, I let what Nature (*tian*) has left in me to meet what Nature has left in the forest. Could that be the reason why the things I make appear to be made by superhuman forces?" (*Zhuang Zi* – "Mastering Life")

The Engraver could carve something that only the spirits and ghosts are believed to be capable of cutting because he truly understands the nature of the wood and his bellstand and could formulate "a complete vision of the bellstand in his mind" so that when he actually puts his hands to it, he does not have to think any more. Nor does he need to look at an existing bellstand at this moment as his model: the image is already in his *lingfu*. It seems as if the bellstand simply grows out naturally of his hands and come to life under his carving knife. To achieve the complete comprehension, however, he has to give up his self-awareness and merge with what he is creating. The advice from Zhuang Zi is that "a perfect man uses his heart as a mirror" (*Zhuang Zi* – "Responding to the Emperors") and always keeps the mirror clear and holds it still:

When water is still, it can clearly reflect [things as tiny as] a hair from the beards or eyebrows. Its evenness makes the perfect levelness: [that is why] the greatest of craftsmen adapt their standard of levelness from it. If mere water clarifies so when it is still, how much more the spirit? The heart of a great sage is always still! [Thus] it is the reflector of Heaven and Earth, the mirror of the myriad things. (*Zhuang Zi* - "The *Dao* of Heaven")

To Zhuang Zi, the mirror is bright, still and unbiased, and thus able to clearly reflect things in the minutest details without distortion or hiding anything (*ying er bu chang* 應而不藏) (*Zhuang Zi* – "Responding to the Emperors").

The metaphor of the mirror may remind us of the mirror metaphor used so often in Western art history, especially as employed by such scholars as Simonides and Samuel Johnson. However, there exist a few important differences between the Western metaphor of the mirror and the Chinese metaphor of mirror. The most apparent difference, as Yue Daiyun (1991:219-228) rightly points out, is that while the mirror was usually used as a metaphor for the art work in the West, it was generally used as a metaphor for the artist or the artist's heart in Chinese art theories. As such, the Chinese metaphor of mirror reveals not only what art should represent but also, and more importantly, how the artist can best represent it in the artwork. The answer to the what part has always been simple: Heaven, Earth and the myriad things (*tiandi, wanwu* 天地萬物) or in Xie Zhen's 谢榛 (1495-1575) words, the millions of natural scenes and seven human emotions (*wanjing qiqing* 萬景七情). Or as Xie Zhen puts it in another place, "poetry is a tool to vividly represent (moxie 模寫) scenery and emotions."[8] There is no question, as we have seen so far, that the final representation should be vivid and natural as if real. It is not the question of whether, but the question of how, art should represent that has engaged the better part of the energies of Chinese artists and theorists during the past two and half millennia. And it is exactly on the latter aspect of the creative process where the Chinese and the West differ most. In the West, we are used to the concept that artistic creation is an active, dynamic process, which constantly involves the intelligence of the artist. While the same is also true for many Chinese literary theories, the Chinese artists of the school of Zhuang Zi tend to advise against any conscious participation of human intelligence and acquired knowledge. Instead, they emphasize the "stillness,"

"emptiness" and "pureness" of the heart. As the fable of the Engraver Qi illustrates, the best, and perhaps the only, way to comprehend the true nature of either a natural object or a human phenomenon is to, as we quoted earlier, "let what Nature (*tian*) has left in me to meet what Nature has left in the forest." When one forgets everything acquired and any worldly attachment, his *tian*, that is, what Nature has left in his person, would be at its purest state. At such times, his heart as a mirror is the brightest, because it is still and empty – empty not in the sense as in "I feel empty and blank in my head," but as in "I have kept my stomach empty all through the dinner so that I can take more of that delicious dessert your mother prepared." Therefore, just as Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's *wuwei* 無為 does not really mean "doing nothing," the stillness and emptiness of the artist's heart does not really indicate inertia or passivity, as Cai Zhongxiang, et al. take it to mean (1987:49). Doing nothing is only what appears to be, for the real goal is "to leave nothing undone (*wuwei er wu suo bu wei* 無為而無所不為). By the same token, to keep one's heart and mind empty and still is only a means. Here is how Sui Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), explained it:

> If you want your poems to be miraculous,
> Never be tired of being empty and still.
> [You are] still, therefore, [you can] comprehend all movements,
> [You are] empty, therefore, [your heart can] receive the myriad scenes.
> ("To Master Can Liao 送參寥師")

The end of staying still and empty is to "comprehend all movements" and "receive the myriad scenes." The poet is not simply "passively reflecting the objective world" (Cai Zhongxiang, 49). Although his heart is still and his mind empty, he is not really "doing nothing." He is setting free the best part of his own person, and as a result, he can best

grasp the nature of the various objective scenes and the dynamics of the natural and human world, which are the usual subject of his poems. James Liu, when discussing Yan Yu's 嚴羽(1180-1235) *Classes of Poetry* (*shi ping* 詩品), has put it in a much better way than I am capable:

> In his [Yan Yu's] view, the poet, like the follower of Zen, should seek to attain to a calm contemplative state of mind. When one has achieved this, one can then hope to capture the spirit (shen) of life, of Nature, in one's poetry (1962:81).

However, James Liu does not acknowledge that this suggests a mimetic theory of art. He calls it "the Intuitionalist View" (1962:81) because the process of contemplating or comprehending the spirit of life and Nature is intuitive, which is indeed very different from that of the Western mimetic artists. We will come back, in chapter 4, to the question whether the theory that poetry should capture and embody the spirit/essence (*shen*神) of things should count as mimetic theory. For now, I just want to point out that, although poets such as Yan Yu and Su Shi may indeed have an Intuitionalist idea about the process of contemplating the spirit of life and Nature, the Intuitionalist idea concerns the creative process itself more than the relationship between poetry and life/nature. As long as the poet tries "to enter imaginatively into the life of things and embody their essence, their spirit in one's poetry" (James Liu, 1962:82), his poem should naturally be considered a representation or "embodiment" of life and Nature. Even the contemplative process itself may be said to be mimetic in its strict, dramatic sense, in that by "enter[ing] imaginatively into the life of things," the poet gives up his own identity and assumes that of another. This mimetic idea of artistic creation has obviously been influenced by the Daoists's mimetic assumption on the relationship between *tian/ziran* and *ren*. As far as

the relationship between art and world is concerned, such a mimetic idea of art seems very similar to that of the West as advocated by Aristotle and the neo-classicists. Qian Zhongshu (1990), when discussing the relationship between art and nature in the West and China, observes:

> Generally speaking, there are two major different theories [on the relationship between art and nature]. The first regards nature as the master and model. Art mainly imitates nature. This theory, in the West, first started with Plato, developed in the hands of Aristotle, revitalized by Cicero and flourished in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And its flame is still very strong. Shakespeare's "holding a mirror against nature" is a good example. [In China], a line from Han Yu's poem "To Dongye," can be a perfect summary of this theory, that is, "Literary writing secretly looks to the skills of Nature" (1990:91).

The examples that we discussed in the previous pages would surely fall under "the first" of the "two major theories." The other major theory, which Qian Zhongshu refers to, is of course the one advocated by scholars such as Sir Philip Sidney in the West. As we have seen in the first chapter, Sidney believed that poetry delivers a golden world, which Nature is not capable of creating. Interestingly, some early Chinese writers also had similar ideas. Like Sidney, these writers believed that humankind could excel nature and appropriate its creative skills (*qiao duo tiangong* 巧夺天工). The Chinese belief that man can appropriate the skills of *tian/Nature* must have existed as early as the *Early Zhou* (11th c. -771 BCE) times, because we find in *The Classic of Documents* a claim that "man can replace the skill and achievement of *tian*" (*tiangong, ren qi daizhi* 天工，人其代之)[9]. Li He 李賀, a Tang Poet, seemed to believe that a poet cannot only reach the perfection of natural creation, but also make up what Nature failed to perfect. In his poem, "A High Carriage Passes By" (*Gaoxuan Guo* 高軒過), he praises the poems of

Han Yu 韓愈 and Huang Fushi 黃甫湜, two fellow poets, by claiming that "[their] pens can fix the flaws of Nature and makes *tian* appear to be without merits." (*bi bu zaohua tian wugong* 筆補造化天無功). Qian Zhongshu believes that this claim is the best summary of the second theory, Western and Eastern, on the relationship between art and Nature. It not only indicates that the world created in art is far more beautiful than that found in Nature, but also suggests that beauty is not something that already exists in nature and is ready to be copied. (Qian Zhongshu, 1990: 91).

II. Mimetic Tendencies in the Book of Changes and Their Influences

In the previous section, we have seen how the mimetic tendency in the Daoist view on the relationship between nature and man had influenced early Chinese theories of literature and fine arts. In this section, we will briefly discuss the mimetic tendencies in the *Book of Changes* (*Zhou Yi* 周易), as a Confucian text, and their influence upon Chinese literary and fine arts theories. My treatment of the *Book of Changes* as a Confucian text may sound problematic, and, therefore, calls for further clarification. The *Book of Changes*, as we have it, consists of two major parts: the first has usually been referred to as *yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Yi*) and includes the Sixty Four Hexagrams -- the hexagram names (*guaming* 卦名), hexagram statements (*guaci*卦辭) and line statements (*yaoci* 爻辭). The second part has usually been referred to as *yizhuan* 易傳 (*Commentaries on Yi*) and includes the so-called *Ten Wings* (*shiyi* 十翼), which is a collection of exegetical material traditionally attributed to Confucius himself. The *yijing*

portion of the book is the original text, now generally believed to have been written down around the ninth century B.C. E. It appears to be, as Richard Lynn rightly points out, purely about divination and "had little to do with the values and ideals of Confucian morality and ethics" (1994:4). The exegetic writings in the second part, however, are no doubt Confucian in spirit, although Confucius himself may not have written all the *Ten Wings*. It is exactly the Confucian values and ideals that had directed the interpretation of the *Book of Changes* in the past two thousand years. According to a modern scholar, Jing Jingfang, who devoted his whole life studying the *Book of Changes*, "the *Ten Wings* is the key to the meaning of the *yijing* portion of the book. It would be impossible for us to understand *yijing* without the *Ten Wings*" (1987:26). Richard Lynn, after a careful study of the components of the *Book of Changes,* also concludes:

> Either the writers of the Tuanzhuan (Commentary on the Judgements) and the Xiangzhuan (Commentary on the Images) [the earliest two of the Ten Wings] were ignorant of this original meaning – concerned largely with the mechanics of divination and (often) its amoral consequences – or they knowingly suppressed it in order to replace it with a Confucian (or proto-Confucian) reading. However, with this first layer of exegesis, the collection of texts, which eventually developed into the Classic of Changes as we know it, was given a Confucian slant that shaped all subsequent interpretation – right up to modern times. … Therefore, the original meaning of the earliest parts of the Changes is not represented in the commentary tradition – except perhaps, distantly, in some Qing dynasty (1644-1911) philological approaches to the Classic of Changes. (1994:4)

Therefore, we are perhaps justified in viewing the *Book of Changes* as a Confucian text. However, by treating it as a Confucian text, I am not indicating that I believe the *Book of Changes* can only be read as an embodiment of Confucian ideals and values. The book is so mysteriously complicated, any definite claim on its meaning would, I believe, beg the question. Fortunately, our interest here is neither on the meaning of the book per se, nor

is our goal to study the Confucian values as such. What I intend to demonstrate here is very simple: 1) there exist very strong mimetic tendencies in the *Book of Changes*, especially in the *Ten Wings*; 2) these mimetic tendencies have had far-reaching influence upon later Chinese literary and fine arts theories.

We have seen that the Daoists believed that the universe is made up of a hierarchy of four great players: *Dao*, Heaven, Earth and Man. They advised that man should model himself after Heaven and Earth. The writers of the *Ten Wings* have a similar theory on the order of the universe and man's relationship to Nature. However, in their system, the four greater players have been reduced to the three talents (*san cai* 三才): Heaven, Earth and Man. Although *Dao* is still an important factor, the transcendent *Dao* as expressed in Lao Zi's term *wu* seems to have faded into the term *Taiji* 太極 (the great ultimate), which is only mentioned once in the whole book. In the *Ten Wings*, *Taiji* is still acknowledged as the beginning state of the universe. However, Heaven (*tian)* has become the one responsible for creating and nourishing everything. *Dao* has been explained as "the interaction between the *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽." As such, it is no longer transcendent but immanent, because *yin* and *yang* are simply two different aspects of the same thing. *Dao* in this sense would simply mean, as many modern commentators have interpreted, the intrinsic principles that govern the dynamics of various things. The *Book of Changes* is basically a book meant to provide practical advice and guidance to human actions on all occasions; therefore, such a shift of attention from the transcendent to the more concrete level of *Dao* is only natural. In spite of this shift, the *Book of Changes* shares the Daoist ideas on man's relationship with Nature: Man will only act well by imitating Heaven and

modeling himself after Earth (*xiaotian fadi* 效天法地) ("Appended Phrases" I.7). The authors of the *Ten Wings* believe that the Hexagrams contain and systematically represent the *Dao* of Heaven and Earth and it can be used to understand everything, from the formless and hidden to the concrete and apparent, because it "resembles Heaven and Earth" and "uses Heaven and Earth as its standards" ("Appended Phases", I.4). The hexagrams are believed to be a representation of the whole universe; but they start with the most noticeable and greatest elements:

> Therefore, of things that serve as models for images, none are greater than Heaven and Earth. Of things involving the free flow of changes, none is greater than the four seasons. Of images that are suspended above and emit brightness, none are greater than the sun and the moon. Of things respected and thought eminent, none is greater than rich and noble position. ("Appended Phrases", I.11)[10]

From these observations, the "Appended Phrases" claims that in the hexagrams we can find the representations of these great elements of the natural and human world. This is how the hexagrams are believed to have developed:

> Therefore, in change there is the great ultimate. This is what generates the two modes [the yin and yang]. The two basic modes generate the four basic images, and the four basic images generate the eight trigrams. ("Appended Phrases", I.11)

The two modes (*liangyi* 兩儀) refer to the first two basic line modes (*Qian* and *Kun* or *ying* and *yang*) of the hexagrams. They represent the "two faces," that is Heaven and Earth, in reality. The four images (*sixiang*, 四象) refer to the four combinations of the two basic line modes. These four images represent the four seasons in reality. The combination of the two basic modes or "two faces" is not enough to represent the universe, because there exist "three talents," that is Heaven, Earth and Man. Therefore,

the four combinations of the two basic modes have to be further combined with a third line. As a result, the eight trigrams are generated. However, the eight trigrams still cannot perfectly represent the dynamics of the universe, because within each and every thing, there are two opposite elements, that is, the *yin* and the *yang*, which are constantly interacting with each and bringing changes to it. Thus, the trigrams have to be doubled to form hexagrams (*jian sancai er liang zhi* 兼三才而兩之) ("Explaining the Trigrams" II). The further combination of the trigrams yields the sixty-four hexagrams, that is, the whole divination system of *yijing*.

In the same manner, the way the sixty-four hexagrams are arranged is also, according to the belief of the ancients, an imitation of the way in which the universe has come into existence. This is explicitly stated in "Providing Sequence of the Hexagrams," one of the earlier among the *Ten Wings*:

> Only after there were Heaven [Qian, Pure Yang, Hexagram 1] and Earth [Kun, Pure Yin, Hexagram 2], were the myriad things produced from them. What fills [the space between][11] Heaven and Earth is nothing other than the myriad things. This is why Qian and Kun are followed by Zhun [Birth Throes, Hexagram 3]. Zhun here signifies repletion.
>
> Zhun is when things are first born. When things begin life, they are sure to be covered [the liberal meaning of meng – i.e., encapsulated in membranes, eggs, or seeds.] This is why Zhun is followed by Meng [Juvenile Ignorance, Hexagram 4]....
>
> ("Providing Sequence of the Hexagrams")

Obviously, the order of the hexagrams matches the order of the things or phenomena the hexagrams represent. Not only the arrangement of the hexagrams, the divination process is also believed to be governed by the need to model the universe:

> The number of the great expansion is fifty [yarrow stalks]. Of these we use forty-nine. We divide these into two groups, thereby representing the two [i.e.,

> the yin and the yang].[12] We dangle one single stalk, thereby representing the three [i.e., the three powers, or Heaven, Earth and Man]. We count off the stalks by fours, thereby representing the four seasons. We return the odd ones to a place between the fingers, thereby representing an intercalary month. Within five years, there is a second intercalary month, so we place a second lot of stalks between the fingers; after that we dangle another single stalk [and continue the process].
>
> Thus the stalks needed to form Qian [Pure Yang, Hexagram 1] number 216, and the stalks needed to form Kun [Pure Yin, Hexagram 2] number 144. In all, these number 360 and correspond to the days of a year's cycle. The stalks in the two parts [of the Changes] number 11,520 and correspond [roughly] to the number of the ten thousand [i.e., "myriad"] things. ("Appended Phrases" I.9)

We can see that the divination steps, like the combination and arrangement of the hexagrams, show an attempt to represent the whole universe, from the three great talents to the myriad things, from the four seasons to every day of the year. And from the "Appended Phases," we get the impression that to the authors of the *Ten Wings*, not only the hexagrams, as a systematic whole, as well as the process in which the system was developed, are highly mimetic, the individual hexagrams themselves are also believed to be mimetic representation of things in nature.

As we know, each of the sixty-four hexagrams is an image (*xiang* 象), which consists of two trigrams or six lines (*yao* 爻). Although modern scholars such as Chen Liangyun (1991: 201-222) and James Liu (1975:18) tend to look at these images as abstract symbols that represent concepts rather than concrete things, the "Appended Phrases" explains them quite differently:

> This is why the Changes as such consist of images [xiang]. The term image means "the making of semblance," and the Judgments deal with their materials. The lines [yao] as such reproduce every action that takes place in the world. ("Appended Phrases" II.3)

> Therefore, as for the images, the sages had the means to perceive the mysteries of the world and, drawing comparisons to them with analogous things, made images out of those things that seemed appropriate. In consequence of this, they called these "images". ("Appended Phrases" I.8, I.12)
>
> The lines reproduce how particular things act, and the images provide likeness of particular things. ("Appended Phrases" II.1)

In such passages, the author of the "Appended Phrases" seems to believe that the hexagrams are developed from images of concrete things. The hexagrams not only provide "semblance" or "likeness of particular things" through the images. They also represent the internal dynamics of the thing represented in the image through the lines (*yao)*. These hexagrams were believed to have been developed by the sages through keen observation of the images of things in nature. This is first made clear in a sentence that begins the second section of the Appended Phrases: *Shenren Shegua guanxiang* 聖人設卦觀象. Richard Lynn has translated the sentence as "The sages set down the hexagrams and observed the images" (1994:49). While Lynn's translation of the sentence may be another reasonable interpretation, it has traditionally been taken differently. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648), the most authoritative Tan Dynasty commentator, for example, explains the sentence as to mean:

> 聖人設畫其卦之時莫不瞻觀物象，法其物象然后設之卦象。
> When the sages were creating the hexagrams, without exception they observed the images of the things; they modeled [the hexagrams] after the images of the things and then set down the images of the hexagrams. (*Thirteen Classics,* 145)[13]

We will come back for a more detailed look at the *Ten Wings'* theory on how the sages created the hexagrams. For now, suffice it to say that Kong Yingda's interpretation of the above quoted sentence in such a manner is testimony enough to conclude that the images

of the hexagrams were traditionally believed to be imitative of things in nature. Because the images and lines of the hexagrams represent the images and internal dynamics of natural things, the authors of the "Appended Phrases" also believe that they can, in turn, be used as models for new human inventions. Many tools and utensils were believed to have been created this way. Here are the first two on the list:

> He [Lord Bao Xi] tied cords together and made various kinds of snare nets for catching animals and fish. He probably got the idea for this from the hexagram Li.
>
> After Lord Bao Xi perished, Lord Shen Nong applied himself to things. He hewed wood and made a plowshare and bent wood and made a plow handle. The benefit of plowing and hoeing he taught to the world. He probably got the idea for this from the hexagram Yi ("Appended Phrases" II.2)

The question remains: from what aspect of the hexagrams the great sages "got the idea" for their inventions? One answer, as the Jin Dynasty commentator, Han Kangbo 韓康伯 (?-385), maintained in his annotations, is that the sages were inspired by the meaning of the hexagrams's names. However, this interpretation seems, as Kong Yingda, who largely accepts Han's understanding on other aspects of the book, observes, to have missed the point (*Thirteen Classics,* 166-7). Another answer to the question is: the sages got the ideas from the images of the hexagram. This theory has been generally accepted since the Han Dynasties, because it is directly supported by an earlier statement from the "Appended Phrases" itself: "In fashioning implements, we regard their images as the supreme guide" (I.10). The sages studied the images of the hexagrams and from their forms they invented the tools. The hexagram of *Li*, for example, "consists of trigram *Li* doubled and is supposed to resemble the pattern in the mesh of nets" (Richard Lynn, 1994:97). It is believed to have been developed through the imitation of some real

mesh-like things, such as cow-webs, as Zhang Jiliang suggested (1993:609). The mesh-like image of *Li* in turn served as the model for the invention of fishing and snare nets. In other words, the sages invented tools and utensils by imitating the imitations of natural objects or phenomena.

We have so far found a mimetic tendency in the *Ten Wings'* theories about the individual hexagram, the arrangement of the hexagrams and even the divination process. There remains one more aspect to look at, that is, their theory on how the sages developed the images of the trigrams and hexagrams. The *Ten Wings* presents us with two versions of the invention story of the hexagrams. The first version is found in the following passage from the Appended Phrases:

> Therefore Heaven produced numinous things, the sages regarded these as ruling principles. Heaven and Earth changed and transformed, and the sages regarded these as models. Heaven hung images in the sky and revealed good fortune and bad, and the sages represented them with images [of the hexagrams][14]. The Yellow River brought forth a diagram, and the Luo River brought forth writings, and the sages regarded these things also as ruling principles. ("Appended Phases" I.11)

The diagram from the Yellow River and the writings from the Luo River refer to two legends about how the great sages came to invent things like the eight trigrams. The legend has it that during the time of the mythical sage-king Fu Xi 伏羲, a dragon-horse (*longma* 龍馬) emerged from the Yellow River. On its back was inscribed a diagram, which was believed to be the prototype of the eight trigrams. Fu Xi used it as a model and drew the eight trigrams. Because it emerged from the Yellow River, it was given the name the Yellow River Diagram (*hetu* 河圖). The story of the Luo River Chart (*Luo Shu* 洛書) is a similar legend: during the time of king Yu 禹, a spirit-tortoise (*shengui* 神龜)

came up from the Luo River. On its back is inscribed a design, or some kind of map. At that time, king Yu was controlling a flood on the Luo River, so he saw it and used it as a model for the nine-fold division of ancient China (*hongfan*洪範). So according to this theory, the sage kings did not really create the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams were drawn after the model presented by Heaven and Earth.

Another theory about the invention of the trigrams and hexagrams is that the sages derived the images through their observations of images of natural things and phenomena. We have actually touched upon this a little earlier. In support of this claim, we have quoted the statement: "The sages observed the images and set down the hexagrams (聖人設卦觀象)" ("Appended Phrases" I.2). Similar statements can be found in several other places in the "Appended Phrase:" I.4, I.8, I.12. However, the following passage is the most interesting and influential:

> When in ancient times Lord Bao Xi ruled the world as sovereign, he looked upward and observed the images in heaven and looked downward and observed the models that the earth provided. He observed the patterns on birds and beasts and what things were suitable for the land. Nearby, adopting them from his own person, and afar, adopting them from other things, he thereupon made the eight trigrams in order to become thoroughly conversant with the virtues inherent in the numinous and the bright and to classify the myriad things in terms of their true, innate natures. ("Appended Phrases" II.2)

In spite of its legendary appearance, this story clearly suggests a mimetic relationship between the eight trigrams as a human creation and the world, that is, Heaven, Earth and Man. However, the trigrams are not just superficial copies of the appearance of the natural world. They are the result of keen observations of the images in Heaven, models on Earth, as well as the patterns of natural objects and human conduct. Again, the hexagrams not only include images but also the interaction of the six lines, which

represent the internal dynamics of things.

Many modern Chinese scholars have acknowledged the mimetic theory expressed in the above quoted passage. Cai Zhongxiang and Huang Baozhen, for example, when commenting on this passage, observe that "the *Commentaries on the Changes* [i.e., the *Ten Wings*] has, for the first time, touched upon the question of the origin of literary art. It proposes the theory of "imitating Heaven and modeling after Earth" (*xiangtian fadi shuo* 象天法地說)" (1984:68). They continue to point out that

> although the passage was originally meant as an explanation of how Lord Bao Xi invented the eight trigrams, it has had far-reaching influence upon later theories of literature. Liu Xie 劉勰(467–532), for example, in his *Literary Mind and Carving of Dragons* (*wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍), had developed the theory of 'imitating Heaven and modeling after Earth' expressed in this passage to explain the origin of human *wen* 文. Human *wen* covers very wide areas; literary art is, of course, part of it. In other words, [to Liu Xie], the early literary writings were also the product of imitation of nature (1984:69).

Huan Qingxuan 黃慶萱, a Taiwanese scholar, shares a similar idea on the above legendary passage and its influence upon later Chinese theories of literature. In an article entitled "The Literary Value of *The Book of Changes*", *Lectures on Literature*, Huan, after quoting the above passage, remarks:

> Therefore, we may discover that The *Book of Changes* originates from the Eight Trigrams. The Eight Trigrams, in turn, came from *imitating nature* [Italics mine]. First, there was the Eight Trigrams, then the Explanation of the Trigrams came into being. And this in turn evolved into the whole *Book of Changes*. Therefore, all these can be said to have come from imitating natural phenomena. This has had great influence on early Chinese literary theories. (1982:33)

To illustrate the great influence of this mimetic idea upon early Chinese literary theories, Huan, as Cai Zhongxiang and Huan Baozhen, mentions Liu Xie's *Literary Minds and the Carving of Dragons*, as an example:

> "... He [Liu Xie] points out, in Chapter I, 'Yuan *Dao*', that the colorful patterns of the dragons and phoenixes and the wonderful beauty of the rosy clouds are the origin of human spatial art; that is, they are the origin of all visual art. Then he describes the sounds from the trees and holes on earth when breezes blow through the forest, and the sounds of flowing waters stroking pebbles in the brooks.
>
> These sounds are [believed to be] the origin of all human musical art. These theories [of Liu Xie's] make it clear that art originate from imitating natural phenomena, whether it is visual art or musical art. This theory has started as early as the *Book of Changes.* (1982:33)

James Liu (1975), however, interprets the same passage in an interestingly different way. Instead of a mimetic tendency, he sees in it the prototype of a metaphysical theory of literature:

> This passage has been interpreted by Lo Ken-tse[15] as an expression of the idea that writing (and hence literature) imitates Nature, but since the Eight Trigrams are obviously abstract symbols and not pictograms imitating natural objects, it would be truer to say that the passage suggests that writing symbolizes the underlying principles of Nature (1975:18).

I find James Liu's comments very interesting because they reveal two things about James Liu's theory. First, this view of Liu's appears to be based upon a superficial sense of the term *imitation* or *mimesis.* James Liu seems to believe that in order for something to be an imitation of something else, this something must assume the same physical form or appearance. Since the trigrams are not pictures of natural objects, they, therefore, cannot be mimetic. If this was how Aristotle and his followers understood the term, it would indeed seem strange that they could still claim that all literary works are mimesis, because no literary work can, like a painting, represent human actions or even human forms and natural objects in lines, shapes and colors. Literary writings work only in words as symbols. No one can understand what is represented in the words without

interpreting them first. Secondly, in making the above statement, Liu seems to have confused what the combinations of the eight trigrams can represent with the trigrams themselves. Even if the trigrams are but abstract symbols, instead of pictures of real objects, the individual eight trigrams themselves cannot be said to be the symbolization of "the underlying principles of Nature." Because it is not the appearance of the eight trigrams that are important, but how they are combined with each other and the specific occasion and affair that is being divined that would finally decide their meaning. As we have seen, the authors of the *Ten Wings* not only believe that each of the hexagrams are derived through imitation of images in heaven and models on earth; they also suggest that the arrangement of the hexagrams into the divination system as well as the divination process are intended to represent the universe and the way things operate within it. What the passage, which we last quoted from the "Appended Phrases," expresses is exactly the same thing: not only the individual trigrams, but the trigrams as a whole and the whole process of inventing the trigrams are achieved through "imitating Heaven and modeling after Earth."

Therefore, I believe that scholars such as Luo Genze, Huan Qingxuan and Cai Zhongxiang are more justified in discerning a mimetic theory in the "Appended Phrases" than James Liu's reading of a metaphysical theory. James Liu's refutation of a mimetic interpretation of the passage and his own reading of a metaphysical theory are really based on two claims: 1) that the trigrams are not pictograms that represent concrete images in nature; and 2) that the trigrams are abstract symbols of "the underlying principles of Nature." From a modern or post-modern point of view, his first claim is no doubt right. However, it may not be exactly how the ancient Chinese viewed the

trigrams. For example, we have seen from our earlier discussions that the authors of the *Ten Wings* seem to believe the trigrams and the hexagrams to be images that represent the images of things in nature. Since the Han Dynasties, scholars started to treat the trigrams and hexagrams as the prototype of Chinese characters, the majority of which they took as pictures. The legend of Lord Bao Xi's invention of the eight trigrams has been cited again and again in Chinese history to explain the origin of the Chinese pictographic writing system. Xu Shen 許慎(30-124), the Han Dynasty lexicographer, in the preface to his *Explanation of Writing and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字), for instance, regards the eight trigrams as the prototypes of Chinese pictograms. Xue explains the pictographic script (*xiangxing wen* 象形文) as "those characters which paint [the form] of the things. One can elucidate their meaning through their physical forms" ("Preface"). Xu Shen's theory has ever since been accepted and repeated by later scholars to explain the origin of not only the Chinese writing system but painting as well. For instance, the Song Dynasty scholar, Han Chunquan 韓純全 writes in the preface of his *Complete Collection of Landscape Paintings of Chunqian*:

> Painting came into being after Lord Bao Xi drew the eight trigrams. It has ever since been used as a tool to thoroughly comprehend the virtues of Heaven and Earth and to classify the myriad things in terms of their true, innate natures. During the reign of the Yellow Emperor, the great histographer named Cang Jie 蒼頡 was born. He observed the shapes of such natural creatures as fish, dragon, tortoise and birds and created the characters. With time, these were further developed and as a result painting and written documents came into existence. The characters were originally paintings. First there were paintings; then there were writing characters. (Shen Zhizheng 1982:133)

I believe that theories such as the ones quoted here are evidence enough to indicate that

our ancestors did not always regard the eight trigrams as abstract symbols. Many did regard them literally as pictures that represent things found in nature. Even as late as our modern era, the oft-quoted commentator on the *Book of Changes*, Gao Heng 高亨 (1900-?) still believed that the two basic line modes of the hexagrams were a simplistic imitation of the forms of Heaven and Earth:

> [The ancients] represent Heaven with "—" [a solid line] and represent Earth with "--" [a broken line] because the ancients saw that the body of Heaven (sky) is always a whole. They therefore use "—" to present its image (xiang 象). [They noticed that] the Earth consists of two parts: land and water, they therefore use two broken line to represent it.[16]

Although, from a modern point of view, I do not necessarily agree with such literal explanations and have a strong urge, like James Liu, to regard the trigrams and hexagrams as abstract symbols, it does not change the fact that traditionally scholars have generally treated them literally as pictograms. We cannot force our views back upon our dead ancestors – may they rest in peace.

As to James Liu's second claim with regard to his critique of Luo Genze's mimetic interpretation of the legend of Lord Bao Xi's invention of the eight trigrams, again I have to admit that it is true that the trigrams can be regarded as representation or symbolization of the underlying principles of Nature. But why and how should this fact automatically warrant a metaphysical theory and negate the mimetic theory? James Liu's logic seems very simple: a pictorial representation of natural objects or physical forms would be mimetic; but any representation of human nature or underlying principles of Nature qualifies as metaphysical. This logic is obvious throughout his discussion on the Chinese metaphysical theory of literature. One example is his comment on the following

statement on literature by Zhi Yu 挚虞 (?-312) of the Jin dynasty:

> Literature [wen-chang] is that by which we manifest the signs above and below [i.e., in heaven and on earth], clarify the order of human relationships, exhaust principles, and fully understand human nature, in order to investigate the suitabilities of all things. (James Liu, 1975:20)[17]

Zhi Yu's theory of literature here provides us with another example of the strong influence of the "Appended Phrases." To me, there is nothing metaphysical about Zhi Yu's theory of literature. If we have to label it at all, I believe "mimetic," "pragmatic," or "didactic" would be much more suitable than "metaphysical." However, James Liu's only comment on it is:

> In spite of its didactic tone, this statement, at least in part, unmistakably expresses the metaphysical concept of literature. (1975:20)

Unfortunately, James Liu does not further explain why and how Zhi Yu's statement on literature "unmistakably expresses the metaphysical concept of literature" so that we have to do our best by guessing. It seems, again, that any claim that literature deals with the "principles," would count as metaphysical, because "underlying principles" would automatically be the equivalent of *Dao*. And it is assumed that whenever *Dao* is involved, it becomes metaphysical. Such an assumption is nowhere more obvious than in his metaphysical interpretation of the first chapter of Liu Xie's *Literary Minds and the Carving of Dragons.* From his interpretation of Liu Xie's term, *Dao*, as the "cosmic order" (1975:22), James Liu insists that the *Literary Mind* presents "the concept of literature as a manifestation of the principle of the universe" or "the cosmic Tao" (1975:24), and therefore, "[t]his conception of literature is of course primarily metaphysical" (1975:25). Since this is not a study of Liu Xie's *Literary Mind*, nor is it

my intention to deconstruct James Liu's metaphysical interpretation of Liu Xie's literary theory, a detailed analysis of either Liu Xie's application of *Dao* or James Liu's interpretation of it would be outside the scope of our present study. Instead, I will just briefly point out that the concept of *Dao* need not always be interpreted as the "cosmic order." As we have demonstrated previously in this chapter, even for the Daoists, there can be two levels of *Dao*: 1) the metaphysical or cosmic order of the universe and 2) the immanent *Dao*, which Zhuang Zi explained as "cannot be otherwise." In the second sense, *Dao* would refer to the objective laws or principles intrinsic to human affairs or natural objects and phenomena. It can even be understood as "inevitability" or "probability" as Aristotle employed them. There have been wildly different interpretations of Liu Xie's employment of the term *Dao* among modern Chinese scholars. Some insist that it is purely Daoist, others swear that it is Confucian and some even believe that it is Buddhist[18]. It does not matter whether Liu Xie's concept of *Dao* is Daoist, Confucian or Buddhist; given his sworn admiration of Confucius and his pragmatic rootedness, a purely metaphysical *Dao* in his theoretical system seems hardly imaginable. Most scholars, Shen Qian 沈谦(1980), Luo Liqian 罗立乾(1983), Cai Zhongxiang (1987), to name but a few, have noticed this fact and have come to agree that Liu Xie's *Dao* means the *Dao* of Nature (*ziran zhi Dao* 自然之道). What exactly is the *Dao* of Nature then? This is how Cai Zhongxiang, after tracing the development of the term since after Zhuang Zi till Liu Xie's time, interprets it:

> As we discussed earlier, the concept of *Dao* of the Daoist school has double meaning: on one level, it refers to the universal power that governs the cosmic order of the universe, on the other, it refers to the inevitability and laws that govern the dynamics of natural objects and human affairs. From the examples

> we listed above, the concept of the "*Dao* of Nature" primarily refers to the latter instead of the former. It is also in the latter sense that Liu Xie employed the term. (1987:248)

Shen Qian explains the term in a similar manner:

> The term *Dao* is used seven times in the first chapter, "Yuan *Dao*." ... If we carefully analyze their uses, we will find out that the concept of *Dao* actually means the "*Dao* of Nature." ... Nature refers to the objective world. *Dao* means principles or laws; the *Dao* of Nature can be understood as the laws or principles of the objective world. (Shen Qian, 1980:25)

It is exactly based upon such an interpretation of Liu Xie's concept of *Dao* that many modern Chinese scholars such as Huan Qingxuan, Cai Zhongxiang and Huan Baozhen, as we mentioned earlier, have discerned a mimetic theory of literature in Liu Xie's *Literary Mind*. In his further analysis, Shen Qian finds great similarities between Liu Xie's concept of the "*Dao* of Nature" and Alexander Pope's concept of Nature in his *On Criticism*. Shen Qian concludes that "Pope's concept of 'Nature' is the same as Liu Xie's '*Dao*.' Pope's claim that Nature is the origin and source of art is also the same as Liu Xie's theory that literary writing originates from the *Dao* of Nature" (1980:31). He then continues to point out that if we compare Aristotle's mimetic theory of literature and Liu Xie's theory of literature, "we will find that although their wordings are different, in principle they are actually similar" (1980:32).

We have wandered very far from our original passage concerning Lord Bao Xi's invention of the eight trigrams; so before we get lost, let us stop and reiterate our point, that is, even if "it is truer to say that the passage suggests that writing symbolizes the underlying principles of Nature," it does not automatically warrant a metaphysical theory of writing or literature. Principles of Nature do not necessarily have to be metaphysical.

Given the Confucian pragmatic orientation of the "Appended Phrases", principles of Nature would be concerned more with the intrinsic principle or laws of the natural and human world, rather than the cosmic force that governs the universe on the metaphysical level. Therefore, scholars such as Luo Genze and those we quoted above are not very far from the truth when they find a mimetic theory of art from the *Book of Changes* and Liu Xie's *Literary Mind*.

The Daoist philosophy and the *Book of Changes* are two foundational aspects of ancient Chinese civilization. In this chapter, we have briefly examined each of them in order to establish a philosophical and cultural foundation for a Chinese mimetic theory of literature and fine arts. We have seen from our analysis that to the ancient Chinese, just as to the ancient Greeks, mimesis constitutes the basis of man's relation with Nature. The Daoist philosophy is essentially a "natural" philosophy – Nature is the model and master for all human activity. Influenced by the philosophy of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, later Chinese writers and artists advocated that art should represent its subject matter in such a manner as to appear as real and lively as if created by Nature itself. In order to achieve such perfect representation in art, the artist is urged to use his heart as a mirror (*yong xin ruo jing*用心若镜) and keep it bright and clear so that it can reflect things exactly as they are to the minutest details. However, such a reflection is not merely one of appearances. The artist is also urged to empty and still his own heart. To empty and still one's heart is to give up temporarily one's self and enter into the thing that he needs to comprehend and represent so that he can capture its essence and spirit in his art work.

The Confucians, as revealed in the *Book of Changes*, shared the Daoist respect for

Nature. We have seen that the Confucian commentators of the original text of the *Book of Changes* and later traditional scholars believed that almost every aspect of the Hexagrams system have come from imitation of nature: from its individual images, to the arrangement of the hexagrams, to the divination process. The mimetic tendency found in these early Confucian *Commentaries* later evolved into theories that explained the mimetic origins of the Chinese writing system as well as all forms of Chinese arts – painting, calligraphy, literary writing.

Therefore, we may now safely join the voice of scholars such as Toupounce (1980) and conclude with confidence that the mimetic tendency is not only in the blood of the Western peoples. Mimetic tendencies played a significant part in the foundation of the ancient Chinese civilization. Chinese theories of literature and fine arts, as part of Chinese culture, unmistakably reveal the essence of mimesis.

Notes

[1] Translation based upon Grube, G. M. A. *Aristotle: On Poetry and Style*. (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958).

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations of quotations from Lao Zi or *The Dao and its Power* are mine.

[3] Translation from Yen Ling-feng. *A Reconstructed Lao Tzu With English Translation*. Ed. Ho Kuang-mo. Trans. Chu Ping-yi. (TaiPei: Ch'eng wen Publishing Co., Ltd, 1976) *5*.

[4] Quoted second-hand from Chen Guying 陳鼓應. Modern Chinese Translation and Annotation of Lao Zi. Ed. Wang Yunwu 王雲五. (Taibai: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1991) 3.

[5] T*iangong* 天工has an often used synonym, *huagong* written as 化工. 化工 is an abbreviation of 造化之工 (*zaohua zhi gong*, the power and skill of *zaohua*). Zaohua, literally, that which creates and nourishes, is another term for Nature, because of Nature's power of creating and nourishing the myriad things in the universe. In later literary critical writings, the term *huagong* 化工 was more often used than the term *tiangong* to refer to the oppisite of *huagong* 畫工. But because both *huagong* 畫工and *huagong* 化工 are pronounced as *huagong*, I will use *tiangong* in this chapter to mean both *tiangong and huagong*化工 and *huanggong* to mean only 畫工.

[6] Quoted in Yue Daiyun et al. 1993:763.

[7] It seems that what he is looking for in the forest is not the wood with the best quality, but also for a tree that has the best natural shape that resembles the shape he wants the finished bellstand to be, a tiger, as the tradition usually has it, for example. He is also observing, at least according to Ye Daiyun, et al .(1993:620), the birds, animals in the forest, which he will be carving on the bellstand. So what he is trying to contemplate is not really the abstract, metaphysical *Dao*, but the true nature of the things that really concerns his bellstand.

[8] Quoted in Yue Daiyun, et al. 1993: 612. The original text can be found in Xie's *Siming's Remarks on Poetry* (*siming shihua* 四溟詩話), which contains his major theories on poetry

[9] The original text can be found in *The Classic of Document* – "Gaotao Mo" (書-皋陶謨). Quoted in Qian Zhong Shu 1990:92.

[10] Translation and section number of quotations from the *Book of Changes* are based, unless otherwise noted, on Richard Lynn. *The Classic of Changes*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[11] The phrase, "the space between," is my own addition to Lynn's translation.

[12] Lynn here explains that "the two" refers to "the yin and the yang." While this meaning can be indirectly derived from the sentence, I believe "the two" actually refers to "the two faces," that is, Heaven and Earth. Considering that the rest of that same passage talks about the divination process representing actual things and phenomena in reality, such as four seasons and the three talents or powers in the universe, Lynn's "the yin and the yang" in the translation can, perhaps, better be replaced by "Heaven and Earth." However, since I am following his translation, I just quote it as is.

[13] Quotations and their page numbers from the *Commentaries and Annotations of the Thirteen Classics* 十三經注疏 are based on the 1965 reprinted edition by the Art Publishing House. In this paper, I will use *Thirteen Classics* as an abbreviation of its full name.

[14] In Richard Lynn's original translation, the sentence "shengren xiang zhi 聖人象之" is translated as "the sages regarded these as meaningful signs." In my opinion, such a translation is more a free interpretation of the original than a close translation. Therefore, I have changed it into "the sages represented them with images [of the hexagrams]," which I believe is closer to the meaning of the original in Chinese. The sentence may also be understood as "the sages

used them as images [for the hexagrams]."

[15] Or Luo Genze 羅根澤. Luo's interpretation of the passage concerned can be found in his *A History of Chinese Theories of Literature* 中國文學批評史. Vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shangehai guji chubanshe, 1958) 53.

[16] Quoted in Chen Liangyun 1991:203.

[17] Translation by James Liu. The original text can be found in *Collected Materials on Chinese Literary Criticism*. Ed. Ke Qingming, Zeng Yongyi. (Taibei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1978) 184.

[18] For a good summary of opinions on this issue, please refer to Chen Yaonan 陳耀南. *Collected Essays on Literary Minds and Carving of Dragons*. (Hong Kong: Modern Education Research Institute, 1989) 9-26.

Chapter 3

Mimetic Theory in the *Shijing* Tradition

Of all the literary critical writings of ancient China, the "Great Preface (詩大序)," especially the aphorism, "poetry is where the intent [of the mind/heart] goes, (詩者，志之所之也)" is perhaps the most quoted and commented upon by modern Chinese literary critics and sinologists. From this aphorism and another similar laconic phrase, "poetry speaks of the intent (詩言志)," which was already popular before the "Great Preface," it seems evident to many critics that, in the Chinese tradition, poetry is viewed as a vehicle for the poet's expression of the emotions and feelings of his heart or the earnest intent and thoughts in his mind. Therefore, the best term for this kind of poetics would be "expressive." And the expression of intent and emotions suggests something totally different from what Aristotle meant by "art as imitation," because imitation presupposes something concrete and from the outside world instead of such inner elements as intent, thoughts and feelings. Consequently, to many critics, expressive and mimetic theories seem to be contradictory. Since Chinese poetics is first and foremost expressive, it cannot be mimetic. This may be why James Liu 劉若愚 (1975), in his book *Chinese Theories of Literature*, traces most other major literary theories that one can find in world literary criticism, such as expressive, metaphysical, aesthetic, pragmatic, but refuses to acknowledge the existence of mimesis in Chinese literary tradition.

This "non-mimetic" view of Chinese poetics is not only maintained by people like Liu who chiefly work in the West on Chinese literary theory, but also advocated by critics who work in China. Among the latter, we have such critics as Feng Qi 馮契, a modern Chinese aesthetician, and Chen Liangyun 陳良運, a prominent literary critic and professor of Chinese. Feng Qi, when comparing Western and Eastern aesthetics, notices

that "while the Western people developed, in the early stage of their poetics, the 'imitative' [*mo fang* 模仿] and 'typical character' theories, which are first of all based on narrative literature and fine arts, the ancient Chinese critics developed the 'expressive' (*yan zhi shuo* 言志說) and artistic 'yijing' (意境) theories, which are above all based on lyrics and music" (Chen Liangyun, 1991:339). Following Feng's idea, Chen Liangyun argues that "it is because of the very fact that narrative literature was not prosperous in ancient China, at least before Sung and Yuan periods, as it was in the Western literary history, that in Chinese poetics, there is a lack of the kind of literary theory similar to that of the realist poetics, which bases itself on narrative literature"(Chen Liangyun, 1991:339).

Even Earl Miner, who, in his book *Comparative Poetics*, does such an admirable job in bringing the Eastern and Western traditions so close to each other by discarding the "Eurocentric" term "non-mimetic" when describing Eastern poetics, tends to call the Eastern tradition "affective-expressive unmimesis" (Miner, 1990:25). From Miner's use of the term, "unmimesis," I can hardly perceive any major difference between his term and "non-mimesis." The basis on which Miner draws this conclusion is exactly the same aphorism, "poetry speaks of intent," [shi yan zhi] as quoted by Feng. The reason that Miner provides to explain why the ancient Chinese developed an "affective-expressive," instead of mimetic, theory of literature, is, again, the same as that given by Feng Qi and Chen Liangyun mentioned above: because the Chinese poetics is based on lyric poetry while the Aristotelian poetics is based on narrative and dramatic literature.

While we have to admit, as I have already stated in the Introduction, that Western poetics and Chinese poetics do differ, and oftentimes significantly, from each other in

many respects, as is usual and natural for things from such different cultures, I find it excessive, and even wrong, however, to put Chinese poetics and Western poetics at two opposite poles and call one "mimetic" and the other "non-mimetic" or "unmimetic," or to assume that "mimesis" is simply something Western, and not present in Chinese literary tradition until the very end of the last century. The Chinese and the Western peoples do share a lot about poetry, in both theory and practice. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, mimesis had been a fundamental element of ancient Chinese culture. It has had great influence upon early Chinese philosophy, literature and fine arts. In this chapter, I will further demonstrate that the idea of mimesis is not absent from the Early Chinese literary tradition, either in criticism or in poetic practice, by re-examining the major literary theories pronounced in the "Prefaces" to the *Shiing*, and some other traditional *Shijing* criticism closely related to the "Prefaces."

I. The "Great Preface" and Its Mimetic Theory of Poetry

Since the "Great Preface" is usually cited in favor of the expressive theory and to refute a mimetic theory in the Chinese literary tradition, let us first have a close look at it and see whether the mimetic idea of literature is truly absent. It is indeed true that the first few sentences of the "Preface," starting from "poetry is where the intent [of the heart/mind] goes," till "one unconsciously dances with one's hands and feet" (Liu, 1975:69), express an expressive theory, which many critics have pointed out. But the "Great Preface" is not simply this one part; it contains another two parts, which, given the aphoristic and sporadic nature of the majority of traditional Chinese literary critical writings, should be as important as, if not more important than, the first. Therefore, we should read it in its

entirety and try to ask ourselves such questions as "whether the expressive idea is the sole theory made clear here?" and "if it is not, what is its relationship with the other theory or theories?" To the latter question and whether "it clearly emphasizes the spontaneous expression of emotion" (Liu, 1975:70) or not we shall come back later. Let us now examine the first question.

After stating the expressive theory, the author[1] of the "Great Preface," instead of going on elaborating on the same idea, moves into another direction:

> The music of a well-governed world is peaceful and happy, its government being harmonious; the music of a disorderly world is plaintive and angry, its government being perverse; the music of a vanquished country is sad and nostalgic, its people being distressed. (Liu, 1975:63)[2]

This part of the "Preface" is borrowed, almost word for word, from the "Record of Music," in the *Book of Rites* (*liji-yueji* 禮記・樂記), to discuss the relationship between the politico-ethical state of a society and its poetry and music. In ancient China (approximately before the fourth century B. C. E.), music and poetry usually went together. The majority of the three hundred and five poems in the *Shijing* were, in fact, originally the "words" (*ci* 辭) for music or songs; therefore, the author of the "Great Preface" can very conveniently copy the music theory from the "Record of Music" and apply it to poetry, which, due to the extinction of the original musical tunes that accompanied the poems, had achieved the state of a separate mode of art. But the central idea expressed here is still the same: poetry/music of a certain country or region reflects or represents the state of affairs, especially the social state, in that country or region. This same representation idea is reinforced several lines later; after a brief digression to the discussion on the "Six Arts/Principles (*liuyi* 六義), the "Great Preface" continues thus:

> By the time the Kingly Way had declined, and propriety and rightness had been abandoned, [the principle of] government by moral instruction was lost and each state followed a different system of government, each family a different custom. Thereupon the "Changed Airs" and "Changed Odes" arose. (Liu, 1975:65)

This clearly shows that the author of the "Preface" was conscious of the fact that there exists a direct correspondence between human society and literary works; and the emphasis here is upon the relation between human life of a specific time and what is reflected in the literary works of that time period, instead of the relation between poetry and author, because the concept of "changed" airs and odes refers exclusively to the changed social conditions, or to be more specific, changed government, family relations, social customs, and morality, usually from good toward bad. In other words, the focus is on society as a whole, instead of the person or persons who wrote the poems. Hence, in his preface to Shi Yunan and Wang Sheng's book, *The Orthodox of Tang Poetry*, Wang Wan (汪紱1624-1690), a Confucian scholar during the early Qing period, wrote thus: "The theory that the *feng* 風 and *ya* 雅 poems of the *Shijing* should be classified into 'proper (*zheng* 正 correct) poems' and 'changed (*bian* 變 deviant) poems' only started with the theories of Mao Gong and Zheng Xuan . … the categorization of 'proper' and 'changed' poems is based on the times [they reflect, or in which they were created], not on the persons [who wrote them]" (Zhu Ziqing, 181-182). If this idea is only implied in the passage of the "Great Preface" quoted above, it was no doubt consciously developed by a later Confucian scholar, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) in his "*Chronological Introduction to the Shijing*" (*shi pu xu* 詩譜序):

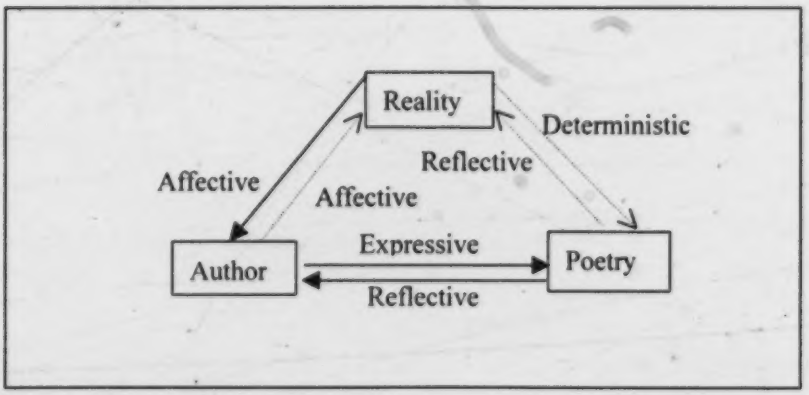
> In the beginning of Zhou [ca. 1100 – 221 B.C.E.], after Hou Ji[3] started the art of planting all sorts of crops, people became civilized and began to have grains to save themselves from hunger; therefore, they wrote poems to describe it. … in the middle period of Zhou, Gong Liu[4] was also diligent in his government and shared his properties with his civilized people. When it came to the time of King Tai and Wang Ji, Zhou had become prosperous enough to look up to Heaven [for its mandate]. The virtues of King Wen and King Wu enabled them to accomplish the cause of their ancestors; they obtained the mandate of Heaven on their persons. They, therefore, became the parents of the world and gave the people [virtuous] government and [peaceful] living. Poems from these times include those "airs" in Zhou Nan and Zhao Nan and such odes as "Singing of the Deer," "King Wen". When it came to the time of King Cheng and the Duke of Zhou, the world reached supreme peace; the rites were set down and music was created. Therefore, hymns (praising songs) became popular. It had indeed reached the height of prosperity. Based on all these, the *feng* and *ya* poems were created. These poems were, therefore, recorded and called the "orthodox" of poetry.
>
> The later kings became very cruel with punishments. King Yi listened to groundless accusations and punished duke Ai of Qi. After King Yi himself forgot the rites, the state of Bei no longer respected competent officials. After that, the government of King Li and King You became even worse. The House of Zhou became completely corrupted. As a result, poems like "The End of the Tenth Month" and "People Toil" were written…." (*Thirteen Classics* 十三經注疏, vol 2, 4-6)

Like the "Great Preface," Zheng Xuan here also tries to divide the *feng* and *ya* poems in the *Shijing* into two major categories – the "proper poems" and the "changed poems." On the surface level, the basis of Zheng's classification may seem to be a chronological order. But what he really has in mind as the dividing line of the two types of poems is what is represented in the poems themselves, that is, the social (political, ethical and even agricultural) situations of the time. The "proper poems" are "proper" not only because they were written down during peaceful and prosperous times, but also, and maybe more importantly, because they were based upon the virtuous deeds of the great kings. In the same way, the "changed poems" are "changed" or "deviational" because they were based

upon the times which deviated from the "Kingly Way." And by implication, the "changed poems" are far inferior than the "proper poems," not so much in the artistic value as in the moral values they represent. Therefore, the awareness of, and the emphasis upon, the reflective relationships between literary works and social conditions are made explicit here.

This awareness was not only popular among the Han Confucian scholars like Cheng Xuan and the author of the "Great Preface," it, in fact, continued all through traditional Chinese literary history, as illustrated by the quotation from Wang Wan above. Even the neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), for example, who is generally credited for discrediting the greater and miner "Prefaces" to the *Shijing and* Zheng Xuan's (127-200) *Annotations to the Mao version of the Shijing* (*Maoshi zheng jian* 毛詩鄭箋), cannot help but employing this "reflective" theory as one important guideline when he comments on the *Shijing* poems in his *Collected Commentaries on the Shijing (Shi jizhuan* 詩集傳), which became ever since, as Yao Jiheng 姚際恒 (1647-?) testifies in his *An Overview on the Shijing* (*shijing tonglun* 詩經通論), the single authority till the early Qing period. Zhu's adherence to the importance of the world-poetry relation is most obvious in the fundamentals of his classification of the poems. Zhu Xi not only sticks to categories of the "proper poems" and "changed poems," he goes even further by labeling the majority of the "changed poems" as "licentious poems (*yinshi* 淫詩)." And from his discussion in the preface of his *Collected Commentaries on the Shijing* (1989:2) on the difference between the "proper poems" and the "changed poems," we can clearly see that the theory in which poetry reflects the world is still very strong.

The traditional Chinese concept of the relationship between the world and literary works, which is demonstrated above, has been summarized nicely by James Liu as, "music [which] reflects the political conditions of the country" (Liu 1975:63). To me, this is already a clear parallel to the Western mimetic claim that poetry is a representation of life. Liu, however, argues that the Chinese "reflective" theory can only be called "deterministic," not mimetic, in that the "Chinese theories of literature expound the concept of literature as an unconscious and inevitable reflection or revelation of contemporary political and social realities," instead of "conscious imitation" (Liu 1975: 63). We shall come back to the question of whether the Chinese were conscious or not in their "reflection or revelation of contemporary political and social realities." Right now, let us examine briefly what the essential difference between "deterministic" and "mimetic" theories really is. In order to make this complicated matter more tangible, we need revisit the relationships between the major elements of literary creative process: world/reality, author and art work. In the Introduction, I have presented a high level view of these relationships together with the role of the reader. The following diagram provides a more detailed illustration:



This graph represents the six possible relationships in the creative process of literature. The broken lines indicate an indirect relationship while solid line indicates a direct relationship. Now let us concentrate on the two factors of "reality" and "poetry." First of all, there does not really exist any direct relationship between these two factors, because firstly, reality can never become a literary work by itself without the effort of the author, and secondly, while it is true that the literary works reflect or represent reality, the reality in the literary work is already a different, usually idealized, typified or universalized, reality. Having clarified this, we can now examine the nature of the relationships between the two factors. It seems that critics usually view this relationship as uni-lateral, in other words, only one kind of relationship is allowed; it can be mimetic or deterministic or something else, but it cannot be both, while it is in fact "bi-lateral," that is, it contains two relationships, as shown in the diagram. The nature of their relation can be different depending on one's viewpoint: it can be deterministic if we look at it from the point of the reality or from the reception point of view; it can be reflective/representational when we start from the point of the work itself. The concept of mimesis should include both relationships: on the one hand, if reality does not determine the content of the literary work, the literary work might not be a reflection or imitation of reality; and, on the other hand, if the literary work does not reflect reality, one can never claim that it has been determined by reality. They are just like the two sides of the same coin and should not, and cannot, be separated. This may be why the "Great Preface," right after the discussion of poetry which "changes" with the times, looks at the poems from the other angle:

> Therefore, those poems in which the affairs of one state are connected with the person of one man [the ruler], are called the *feng*.
>
> The poems which speak of the affairs of the kingdom, and represent/embody (*形*) the customs of its whole territory, are called the *ya*. *Ya* means correct/rectification (*zheng* 正). They relate the causes why royal governments decayed or flourished. There is the difference of small and great in governmental affairs, hence there are the small *ya* and the great *ya*. The *song* (*颂 hymns*) are so called, because they glorify the manifestations/embodiments (*xingrong* 形容) of complete virtue [of the great kings], and retell (*gao* 告) their great successes and triumphs to the gods. (Siu-kit Wong, 167)

Although this part of the "Preface" appears to be defining the three different types of poems collected in the *Shijing*, the point of view shifts, from the reality-poetry perspective, to the poetry-reality perspective. Instead of emphasizing on how reality determines the content and tone of the poetry of a time, this passage focuses on how the content and tone of poetry relates to reality. This gives us a chance to see how the poetry-reality relationship was defined during the Han dynasties. The standard adopted here by the author of the "Great Preface" to classify the poems, and the way he defines the different categories are very significant. Instead of emotions, thoughts or feelings, as one might expect after reading the opening sentence of the "Preface," the standard of what kind of "affairs/matters"(*shi* 事) the poems "speak of" or "represent" is used to classify and define them. Therefore, poems related to "affairs of one State," and concerning the king are called *feng*; and poems that relate the "affairs of the kingdom" and "represent/embody" its "customs" are called *ya*; and those *ya* poems speaking of "great affairs" are great *ya* (*da ya* 大雅) while those about "small affairs" are small *ya* (*xiao ya* 小雅)." Even the *song* poems, that is, hymns, which are usually expressive in nature, are said to be glorifying the manifestations (*xingrong*, literally, embodied

forms/appearances) of the virtues of the great former kings by retelling (*gao*) their actual achievements and triumphs.

It becomes clear, then, that, if the aspect of the relation between literary work and reality revealed in the previous part of the "Great Preface" can only be called "deterministic," there is little doubt that the one revealed in this quotation is "reflective/representational." And when we put the two aspects of the same relationship together, it is only natural for us to conclude that the idea of mimesis is not really absent from the "Great Preface."

II. Mimetic Implications in Pragmatist and Historicist Tendencies

So far we seem to have gone through the whole "Great Preface," but there is, in fact, still another very important literary theory expressed in it that we have not yet touched upon: it is the pragmatic theory. Before we discuss its relevance to our present task, let us first see how this theory is stated. After mentioning the direct correspondence between music/poetry and historical and social situations, the "Great Preface" continues thus:

> Therefore, nothing approaches poetry in maintaining correct standards for success or failure [in government], in moving Heaven and Earth, and in appealing to spirits and gods. The Former Kings used it to make permanent [the tie between] husband and wife, to perfect filial reverence, to deepen human relationships, to beautify moral instruction, and to improve social customs. (Liu, 1975:111-112)

It may be argued, from "in moving Heaven and Earth, and in appealing to spirits and gods," that there might exist a superhuman and even metaphysical element in Chinese literary pragmatism. But it is obvious that this passage is firmly situated in Confucian orthodox values. Its chief emphasis is on the ethico-political function of literature,

instead of the importance of personal "intent." This pragmatic theory, in actually commenting on specific poems, becomes a practice, by the author of the "Minor Prefaces (*xiaoxu* 小序)" and later commentators such as Zheng Xuan, who relates every single poem in the *Shijing* to the kings and royal family members, and interprets them as moral-uplifting tools rather than poems of genuine literary value. There are poems, especially in the *da ya* and *song* sections, that are truly concerned with the kings and royal history of the Zhou House, such as *sheng min* (生民 "The Birth of the Lord of Corn"), *gong liu* (公六 "Duke Liu"), *liu yue* (六月 "The Sixth Moon"), *wen wang* (文王 "King Wen") in the *ya* section, and *qingmiao* (清廟 "King Wen's Temple"), *huan* (桓 "A Hymn to King Wu") in the *song* section being some outstanding examples. But the majority of the poems are not related to the royal house and have little to do with moral rectification. Yet in order to impose upon these poems a moral function, the early commentators tried their best to match these poems with historical figures. For example, *Guanjiu* 關雎, the very first poem in the *Shijing*, is obviously a poem that depicts the process of a young man's courting of a young girl – how he feels sleepless at seeing the girl who appears to him to be his match; how he tries to befriend her with his flute, drum and dance. To modern readers, this young man can be any young man and the young girl can be any girl. But the "Minor Preface" to this poem insists that,

> The *Guanjiu* celebrates the virtue of the queen. This is the first of the Lessons of manners. By means of it the manners of all under heaven were intended to be formed, and the relation of husband and wife to be regulated…Therefore in the *Guanjiu* we have joy in obtaining virtuous ladies to be mates to her lord; anxiety to be introducing ladies of worth; no excessive desire to have her lord to herself…(Legge, 37)[5]

So *junzi* (君子 a gentleman), the persona of the poem, who is traditionally, and also obviously according to the poem itself, a man, here is interpreted as the queen; and the longings, anxieties and desires aroused within the young man by the young girl are turned into the anxieties and desires to serve the king better. This twist is made so that the poem can be used as a tool to teach the "Lessons of manners."

Another typical example of forcing the poem to match historical facts is the "Minor Preface" to *Xintai (*新臺 "the Newly Built Tower"*)* in the *Bei Feng* (邶風) section:

> The *Xintai* is directed against Duke Xuan of Wei. When the duke was bringing to the State a wife for [his son] Ji, he built the new tower near the River, and there forced her. The people hated his conduct and made this ode (Legge, 43).

And in his *Annotations* (*jian*, 箋) to this "Minor Preface," Zheng Xuan added, "Ji refers to the son of Duke Xuan of Wei"(Chen Zizhan, 128). When the Tang commentator, Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648), came to discuss this poem, his detailed annotation in the *Maoshi Zhengyi* (毛詩正義 *The Correct Meaning of the Mao Version of the Shijing*) does nothing more than elaborate the historical story about Duke Xuan of Wei:

> This poem describes what happens when Ji's wife first came from the State of Qi. She has not yet reached the State of Wei. At this time, the Duke of Wei [Ji's father] heard of her beauty. He was afraid that she would not allow him to take advantage of her [after she arrives at the court of Wei]; he, therefore, ordered a new tower to be built on the bank of the River. When she came to the River, he forced her. If the time [of the poem] is when she has already arrived at the court of Wei, it is then not necessary to force her near the River (*Thirteen Classics* vol.2, 105-106).

What these commentators were really trying to do is not to explain the meaning of the poem as a poem, but to turn the poem into a historical record. And they are so successful

that few of the numerous later *Shijing* commentators ever doubted their explanations and annotations to this poem. One Qing commentator, Hu Chenghong 胡承珙, in his *Maoshi Houjian* (毛詩后箋 *Later Annotations to the Mao Version of the Shijing*), actually claims that "About Duke Xuan's not being a good father, although *The Zuo Zhuan* (左傳 *Zuo's Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn*) does record the incident, the details of the story are not quite clear. Thanks to this poem and the 'Minor Preface,' his behaviors are completely exposed" (Chen *Zizhan*, 129).

So poetry, according to the traditional view, not only records historical incidents, it is even more detailed and better than the best history book. But when we actually read the poem, we cannot find a single word that will convince us that the poem is somehow related to this incident with Duke Xuan of Wei:

The New Tower[6]

How bright is the new tower
  On brimming river deep!
Of youth she seeks the flower,
  Not loathsome toad to keep
How high is the new tower
  On tearful river deep!
Of youth she seeks the flower
  No stinking toad to keep.
A net for fish is set
  A toad is caught instead.
The flower of youth she'll get,
  Not a hunchback to wed.

It seems to be a rather simple poem that tells the story of a girl, and, yes, possibly a duchess, who wishes to be married to a young handsome husband but, instead, is married to an old and ugly man. Therefore, several later commentators refuted the interpretation of the "Minor Preface" to the poem. Zhu Xi, for example, writes: "all the historical facts

about Duke Xuan are recorded in *The Autumn and Spring Annals*, but there is no proof that this poem concerns him" (Zhu Xi, 32). Yao Jiheng also warns, when commenting on the first lines of the poem, that "*jiezhe* (解者, readers and commentators) should beware that it is only a metaphor; we should not force ourselves to find meaning from the person of Duke Xuan" (Yao Jiheng, 1958:67).

The tendency of matching the poems in the *Shijing* with historical figures has been described by modern Chinese *Shijing* scholars as "the historization of poetry," of which Zhao Peilin has the most representative summary:

> The Confucian scholars of the Han periods did not understand the nature and characteristics of literature. They could not understand that poetry is only a typified and generalized reflection of life, nor did they accept the fact that literary works possess subtle and profound meanings and a higher-level truth. To them, literary works are nothing more than a copy of life and a record of history; literature and history are both direct description of life and historical facts. Guided by this logic in their exposition of the "*Three-Hundred Poems,*" it is only natural for them to try their best to search for a real historical incident for each poem and match every poem with a real historical figure. ..." (Zhao Peilin, 1989:6).

Although Zhao's accusation here and his general conclusion about the Han Confucian scholars' understanding of literature sound very harsh and biased due to Zhao's own Marxist approach to literature, his observation about the historization tendency among the *Shijing* scholars of the Han periods, as we have seen from the examples above, is indeed true. We can also reasonably conclude that the historicist tendency betrays the fundamental assumption on the part of the Han Confucian scholars that literature is a true representation of society. Their effort in searching for historical figures for the poems is, perhaps, not so much due, as Zhao Peilin suggests, to their failure in understanding that "poetry is a typified and generalized reflection of life," as to their emphasis on the

pragmatic function of literature. Therefore, there are very strong mimetic implications in Chinese pragmatic theory. I hope to come back to this point a little later. Now let us have a look at what effect this has upon the expressive theory represented in the "Great Preface."

When we now look back at the opening sentences of the "Great Preface," we might get a slightly different understanding of the importance and the nature of the expressive theory expressed in the laconic phrase, "*shi yan zhi*" and the following passage from the "Great Preface:"

> Poetry is where the intent of the heart [or mind] goes. Lying in the heart [or mind], it is "intent;" when uttered in words, it is "poetry." When an emotion stirs inside, one expresses it in words; finding this inadequate, one sighs over it; not content with this, one sings it in poetry; still not satisfied, one unconsciously dances with one's hands and feet. (Liu, 1975:69)

When we read the "Preface" from the top down, especially when we isolate this passage, it is natural for us to get the impression, as Siu-kit Wong remarks in the annotation to his English translation of the "Great Preface," that "the basic 'theory' of poetry is essentially an 'expressionist' one" (Wong, 1983:5). However, when viewed in its larger context, even within the "Great Preface" itself, the expressive theory loses its importance in the overall system of ancient Chinese literary theories, because, as we have just seen, the first and foremost important theory in this "Preface," as in any other orthodox Confucian literary critical writings, is the pragmatic theory, which, as James Liu puts it, "remained practically sacrosanct" "from the time Confucianism was established as the orthodox ideology of China in the second century B. C. down to the early twentieth century" (Liu 1975:111).

Besides, against this strong emphasis on the ethico-political function of literature and the historization tendency toward poetry, the "*shi yan zhi*" theory would appear quite different from the kind of expressivism we assume it to be today. The word "zhi" can hardly be equated to emotions or feelings as in "personal/subjective emotions and feelings" as usually found in lyric poetry. Many critics, Miner, Feng Qi, as quoted earlier, usually maintain that Chinese poetics is essentially expressive because it is based on lyric poetry. This explanation is, to say the least, inaccurate. As Zhu Ziqing (1990:172) observes in his book, *Shi Yan Zhi Bian* (詩言志辯 *On the Theory of 'Poetry Speaks of Intent'*), lyric poetry is a category that was not introduced into Chinese literary theory until the twentieth century. Lyric poetry is translated into Chinese as *shuqing shi* 抒情詩, meaning a poem (*shi* 詩) that expresses (*shu* 抒) personal feelings and emotions (*qing* 情). *Qing*, in the modern Chinese environment at least, is usually understood as the subjective feelings and emotions of the individual who writes the poem. Although the term "*shuqing,*" as Zhu Zhiqing pointed out, "was a native Chinese phrase, its new meaning and connotation are borrowed from the West" (Zhu Ziqing, 1990: 172). As demonstrated earlier, during and before the Han Dynasties, the *Shijing* was regarded and studied more as a Confucian moral and, to a great extent, historical, document like the rest of the Five Classics (*wujing* 五經) in the Confucian canon than as a collection of poems. This tradition in the *Shijing* studies remained unchallenged until the thirteenth century when Zhu Xi, the Neo-Confucianist, first attacked the "Preface" and Zheng Xuan's commentaries on the *Shijing* for their use of the poems to prove history, or reading the poems as history. Even judged by modern standards, many of the poems in

the *Shijing* cannot be classified as "lyric poetry," because many of them are simply narrative and descriptive poems that represent everyday activities of the ancient Chinese people; many modern Chinese *Shijing* experts, Chen Zizhan (1991) and Zhao Peilin (1989), for example, even argue that 12 poems in the *da ya* section actually belong to the category of "epic poetry," which depicts the origins, establishment and development of the Zhou Dynasty. Whether these poems can truly be called "epics" or not is beyond the scope of our present discussion. I hope, however, that it is sufficient for us to conclude that we are not really sure if the Chinese expressive theory that started from "*zhi yan zhi*" was necessarily based on lyric poetry. As we can see from the "Great Preface," the *zhi* that poetry is supposed to express is not at all subjective or personal. It is, quite to the contrary, always social; or to use Zhu Ziqing's term, it is "the *zhi* of a state," "and it does not concern the personal affairs of the individual [writer]" (Zhu, 1990:157). In other words, the Chinese expressive theory (*yanzhi shuo*) at the time of the "Great Preface" was still fundamentally different from that after the Jin period when *yuanqing* (緣情 *tracing emotions and feelings*) theory was first introduced by Lu Ji [261-303] and the importance of the individualistic qualities of the writer (his unique *qi* 氣) was emphasized by Cao Pi [187-226]. Only after Lu Ji and Cao Zhi did Chinese expressive theory of literature gradually become prominent and started to take up an individualistic and subjective character; however, even after the expressive theory became prominent, the traditional Chinese literary theory, as James Liu (1975:111) observes, was still dominated by the pragmatic theory.

But this pragmatic theory has to be built upon another theory: the representation/reflective theory, which James Liu has labeled as "deterministic theory,"

as we have mentioned earlier, for the reason that the Chinese literary theory does not stress that the poet should consciously imitate the world (Liu, 1975:66). We have looked at the essential difference between deterministic theory and representation theory in the previous section; now let us briefly examine whether this last claim by Liu is true or not. When discussing the relationship between the pragmatic and deterministic theories, Liu writes:

> The deterministic concept is often allied to the pragmatic, for it is easy to conclude, from the premise that literature inevitably reflects the society in which it is produced, that it can be used as a historical "mirror" from which practical lessons can be learned. It is also easy to shift from the deterministic position that a writer, willy-nilly, reveals contemporary social and political realities, to the pragmatic one that he *should* consciously do so. However, a distinction exists between the two in basic orientation, the one being focussed on phase 1 [that is, the relationship between literary work and reality] of the artistic process, the other on phase 4 [that is, the effect of the literary work upon readers' response to reality]. (Liu, 1975:66)

Liu admits here that in early Chinese literary criticism there has always been the assumption that "poetry … is a true reflection of the times, of 'the spirit of the age'" (Wong, 1983:5); that is reason why the pragmatists can use literature as "a historical 'mirror.'" He also admits that the pragmatic theory at the same time requires that the writer "*should* consciously" reflect society. However, he still holds that Chinese literary theory does not insist that the writer should consciously represent society because pragmatic theory is oriented toward phase 4 of the literary process: the literary works – audience – reality relationship, or the reception of literary works. In other words, what is required of the writer to do with his material by the pragmatic theory does not count as theory about the relationship between the writer and the world, that is, phase 1. This argument appears infallible because it is absolutely true that the deterministic and the

pragmatic theories are oriented toward two different phases, or relationships in the artistic process. But the debatable point is whether we should regard a claim about the writer-world relation made in connection with the reception phase as belonging to phase 1 or phase 4. It appears to me quite plain that as long as a claim is made, or even implied, about what a writer should do with his material, it should belong to phase 1, no matter where and when it is claimed or implied. Consequently, the claim that Chinese literary theory defines the relationship between the writer and the world as "one of unconscious revelation instead of conscious imitation" is not necessarily true.

Even so, one could still argue that the Chinese reflective theory cannot be a conscious mimetic theory because early Chinese literary theory did not explicitly state that the writer should consciously imitate the world. To this, I think, we can first say that there is not any explicit statement in the early Chinese literary theoretical writings specifying that a writer should "only unconsciously reveal the society in his literary works" either. As a matter of fact, there is little explicit discussion about the writer's position in the literary process during the Pre-Qin and Qin-Han periods. The reason may be, if we can speculate, two-fold: 1) due to the emphasis on the pragmatic function of poetry, the writer and his subjective emotions were not considered important; 2) that the representational relationship between literature and society was so obvious to the ancient Chinese, they simply took it for granted. This is clearly illustrated in the assumption that literary works serve as "historical mirrors." Secondly, and more importantly, the mimetic relationship between literature and the world does not necessarily have to be defined on the basis of the conscious effort of the writer. Aristotle, as far as I can judge, did not explicitly insist on this as a criterion either. We get the impression, on the one hand, that

the Aristotelian mimesis involves the conscious effort of the writer because Aristotle's major concern in the *Poetics*, as many critics have pointed out, was how to create a piece of good literature, especially tragedy; and consequently he had a lot to say about the creative process, especially what and how a writer should do in order to achieve the best imitation. On the other hand, because of the dominance of the pragmatic theory in the early Chinese literary theoretical writings, such as the "Great Preface," the emotions of the individuals who wrote the poem were not considered important; therefore, critics seldom touched upon the actual writing process, especially during and before the Han periods. Even when they did come to talk about the techniques employed in the *Shijing*, viz. *fu, bi* and *xing*, they usually concentrated on the techniques as such, trying to define and differentiate the three, instead of dealing with them in connection with the writer, that is, for what purpose and how the writer should employ the techniques.

However, later on when critics like Lu Ji came to talk about the creative process, things surely became different. Lu Ji writes thus in his "Wen Fu" (文賦 "A Descriptive Poem on Literature"):

> Of the modes of writing there are thousands upon thousands,
> But the universe, in its multifarious manifestations
> Is hard to describe,
> And no single means can exhaust its numerous aspects;
> ....
> Even when he finds it difficult to turn a square into a circle,
> He should still consider it his duty to portray the real in absolute detail.
> (Wong, 1983:43)

Although Lu Ji's chief concern here is literary styles and writing techniques, he obviously believes that all the literary modes/styles exist because they are called for by the necessity of depicting the "multifarious manifestations" of the universe; whether or

not a writer can "exhaust its numerous aspects" or "portray the real in absolute detail" is used here as the sole criterion to judge whether his style is appropriate and his writing successful. Therefore, if the idea that the writer should consciously imitate the world is only assumed or implied in the "Great Preface," the emphasis on the conscious effort of the writer in imitating the world is unmistakable with Lu Ji.

III. The "Six Arts" of *Shijing* and Their Mimetic Nature

Another important aspect of the "Great Preface" and later *Shijing* studies is the so-called "Six Principles," or the "Six Classes", as they are sometimes translated, of the *Shijing*:

> Thus in the *Shijing*, there are six classes (principles, aspects): – first, the *feng* (air/wind); second, *fu* (descriptive-narrative pieces); third, *bi* (similaic-analogous pieces); fourth, the *xing* (metaphorical-symbolic pieces); fifth, the *ya* (serious-correct pieces); and sixth, the *song* (hymn songs). (Siu-kit Wong, 1983:167)

This passage simply brings up the concept of the "Six Principles" by reiterating a similar passage from *zhouli – Dashi* (周禮・大師 "The Grand Master," *The Rites of Zhou*), without much further elaboration, except some discussion, as I briefly mentioned in Section I of this chapter, on *feng*, *ya* and *song*. The word *feng* originally means wind or air. It acquires the meaning of "moral influence" with the author of the "Great Preface," probably because Confucius once, when advising Ji Kang-zi about government, said that "the virtue of the gentleman is like wind; the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend" (12.19)[7] Therefore, *feng* is defined as poems "in which the affairs of one State are connected with the person of one man [the ruler];" and the *feng* poems serve as tools for the rulers to morally "transform those

below" and a means for the inferiors to admonish their rulers (Liu, 112). *Ya* means "correct" or "serious" and the *ya* is defined in the "Great Preface" as "the pieces which speak of the affairs of the kingdom, and represent the customs of its whole territory." *Song* means "to praise," and the *song* is defined as poems that "glorify the manifestation/embodiments of complete virtue [of the great former kings] (美盛德之形容), and retell their great successes and triumphs to the gods." From these definitions, it becomes very clear that *feng, ya* and *song* are used as three categories of poems. However, about the other three "Principles," namely, *fu, bi* and *xing,* there is no further discussion whatsoever in the "Great Preface." As a result, during the past two thousand years or so till the first half of the twentieth century, there has always been a heated debate among *Shijing* scholars as to whether the "Six Principles" are all "classes" of poems, or only *feng, ya* and *song* are classes of poems while *fu, bi* and *xing* are the techniques employed in the poems. Accompanying this debate is also the question of how to define *fu, bi* and *xing* which the "Great Preface" fails to specify in clear terms. This debate itself is of no great interest to us any more today, because since the first half of the twentieth century it has been accepted, almost unanimously, by *Shijing* scholars of the New China as a fact that of the "Six Principles" *feng, ya* and *song* are classifications of poems while *fu, bi* and *xing* belong to stylistic features. But a quick look into the early theory of the "Six Principles," especially the definitions of *fu, bi* and *xing*, and how the theory evolved into its present form is quite helpful for us to understand that the "Six Principles" were originally mimetic in nature and that it is only later on that they became contaminated by the expressive theory. Since I have already demonstrated the mimetic theory underlining the classification of the three categories of poems, *feng, ya* and *song,*

in Section I, I will chiefly concern myself with *fu, bi* and *xing* in the remaining pages of this chapter.

The first attempt in defining the three terms comes from Zheng Xuan's (127-200) *Zhouli Zhu* (周禮注, *Annotations to The Rites of Zhou*). When commenting on the concept of the "Six Categories of Poetry" (*Liu shi* 六詩) in "The Grand Master," *The Rites of Zhou,* Zheng writes:

> *Feng*, relates the achievements of the government of the Sages and Great Kings. *Fu*, meaning to describe, represents in direct terms the good and evil of the government and its moral education. *Bi*, seeing the shortcomings of the government, yet feeling afraid to criticize in direct terms, deals with them with analogies. *Xing*, seeing the good of the government, yet in order to avoid sounding like flattery, chooses nice things to compare it. *Ya* means correct; it relates the correct behaviors of the time in order to set examples for the times to come; *Song* means to praise; it also means the embodiments/appearances. *Song* praises the virtues of the time in order to spread them and set them as good examples. (*Thirteen Classics,* vol. 3, 356)

Obviously Zheng Xuan believes that *fu, bi* and *xing* are also categories of poems in the *Shijing*, because he not only keeps the original term *"liu shi"* (six categories of poetry), instead of following the term "*liu yi*" (six principles of poetry) as employed in the "Great Preface," but also tries to define all the terms in the same manner. Whether this idea of his is justifiable or not does not concern us here; what is interesting to us is the definitions he gives to the "Six Categories of Poetry." There is no big difference in the way Zheng Xuan defines *feng, ya* and *song* from that employed in the "Great Preface," for both define these terms on the basis of the affairs of the government and their successes and failures that the poems relate or sing about. Zheng also extends the same standard to the definitions of *fu, bi* and *xing*. From his definitions of these three terms we can see even

more clearly the assumption of the mimetic nature of poetry, because all the three types of poetry, that is, if we can agree with Zheng Xuan in regarding them as types of poetry, are said, like *feng, ya* and *song*, to "represent the good and evil of the government and its moral education." They are different only in the way they achieve this task: *fu* in direct, descriptive and narrative terms, *bi* with analogies and comparisons and *xing* in metaphorical and symbolic terms. The need to use *bi* and *xing* is called for, not so much by the different subject matters as by the need to morally transform one's inferiors imperceptibly, like the wind bends the grass, and admonish one's superior in the slightest and most indirect terms possible so that no offense is committed by the speaker and no embarrassment caused for the listener, a standard first started in the "Great Preface."

Although Zheng's idea that *fu, bi* and *xing*, like *feng, ya* and *song*, are types of poetry has been rejected by many later *Shijing* scholars, the definitions he provided shed much light on our understanding of the terms and influenced greatly the later definitions of the terms, even when they are defined as techniques. Here is, for example, what some of the later critics said about *fu*:

> Zhi Yu (挚虞？-312) in his "*Major Currents of Literary Writings* (*Wenzhang liubie zhi* 文章流別志)" defines *fu* as "another name for description and representation." (ZGWXPP Ziliao 中國文學批評資料匯編 vol. 1, 184)

> Zhong Rong 鐘榮 (?-518) in his *Preface to The Classes of Poetry* (*Shiping xu* 詩品序) writes: "the narrative-descriptive [*Fu*] directly reports a situation and depicts objects, in words, with some hidden senses."(Siu-Kit Wong, 1983:92)[8]

> Liu Xie 劉勰 (465-532), in the "Exposition of Fu" section of his *Literary Mind*, explains *fu* thus: "The *Shijing* has Six Principles, the second of which is called *fu*. *Fu* means to arrange and represent. It arranges writings and literary grace in order to embody things and describe intents." (Liu Xie, 1994:120)

> Cheng Boyu (成伯瑜), a Tang critic claims, "*Fu*, refers to affairs and represents them." (Qi Zhixiang, 1993:155)
>
> Zhu Xi, the Neo-Confucianist, writes in his *Collected Commentaries on Shijing*, "*Fu* represents affairs and relates them in direct terms." (Zhu Xi, 1988:3)
>
> Li Zhongmeng (李仲蒙), a Qing Dynasty *Shijing* scholar defines *fu* as "narrating affairs in order to express emotions and feelings; both emotions and affairs are exhausted." (Li Xiang, 1990:140)

In all the above, and in many other definitions of *fu*, the key qualities that Zheng Xuan assigned to *fu* keep recurring. For example, Zheng emphasizes the quality of "directness," expressed in the Chinese word, *zhi* 直, of the description and narration of *fu*; all the later definitions also include the same word *zhi,* as Qi Zhixian (1993:156) summarizes, "directly report" (Zhong Rong); "directly present" (Kong Yingda); "directly relates" (Zhu Xi); "directly speaks of" (Wu Hang); and the list could go on. So "directly decribes/narrates" (*zhi cheng* 直成,*zhi pu* 直铺) in all these theories means to represent things as they are without distortion or indirection. And from the above definitions, the content of description and narration is usually "affairs," "situations," "objects." It is only during the more recent stages in its development that the term *fu* became extended by the later expressive theory and acquired, in the theories of critics such as Li Zhongmeng whom we also quoted above, the added feature of "expressing emotions." Although a typical modern New China definition would be "a method or stylistic feature that employs direct narration, description and discussion to create a certain atmosphere and express emotions and feelings"(Li Xiang, 1990:139), *fu*, traditionally, as one of the "Six Principles," has, no doubt, been mimetic in nature. And it

is, perhaps, due to this mimetic nature that *fu* has been slighted by later critics, as Qi Zhixiang (1993:156) and Li Xiang (1990:139) point out, as the least important of the three techniques of the *Shijing*. *Fu*, however, is the technique that is used most in the *Shijing*: twice as often as *xing* and six times more than *bi*, according to statistics from a Ming critic, Xie Zhen 谢榛 (1495-1475)[9]. It is also this very technique, *fu*, that was developed into a full-fledged genre in the Han times and dominated the Chinese literary scene for several centuries.

Although the evolvement of the *bi* and *xing* theories has been more complicated and the present standard definitions of the two terms are drastically different from those given by Zheng Xuan[10], Zheng's theories remained the most representative and influential for a long period, even Cheng Boyu 成伯瑜 in the Tang Dynasty still followed Zheng and define *bi* and *xing* as "things of a kind come together. Good and evil have different manifestations; an analogy of evil with evil is called *bi* ... and a comparison of good with good is called *xing*" (Qi Zhixiang, 163). Since this is not a study of tracing the influence of Zheng's theories, let us suffice to say, without further examples, that during the Han periods, *fu*, *bi* and *xing* were chiefly understood as categories of poems included in the *Shijing*, and the early definitions of these terms, like those by Zheng Xuan, are clearly based on the idea that literature represents society.

So far we have examined all the major aspects of the "Great Preface" and, in the process, some comments and expositions of the *Shijing* from other important traditional *Shijing* scholars. Here again are some of the important conclusions we have drawn from our

discussions: 1) The expressive theory in the early Chinese literary critical writings, such as the "Prefaces," is quite different from our understanding of the term today, for the "*zhi*" that poetry was supposed to express was not personal, subjective feelings and emotions. It was more the "*zhi*" of a time, a society or a state than that of the writer. The writer and his/her feelings were not considered important. 2) The most important literary theory that served as the guideline for practical commentaries on the *Shijing* is the pragmatic theory; it assumed and required that literary works should reflect the social situation truthfully so that literature can serve as a "historical mirror." 3) The reflective/representation relationship between poetry and reality has already been explicitly stated in the "Prefaces." We cannot say that this reflective relationship can only be called deterministic; when we look at this relationship from the reality end, it is deterministic; if we view it from the literary work end, it is reflective/representation. However, these two should not be separated, for they are merely the two sides of the same relationship, which can only be called "mimetic;" 4) mimesis is also obvious in the "Six Principles" of the *Shijing*, at least, as they were defined in the Han periods, because the basis that the "Prefaces" and Zheng Xuan employed to classify and define the "Six Principles" is the "affairs," instead of "feelings," or "emotions," that the poems represent. From all these conclusions, it becomes reasonable, I believe, for us to claim that mimesis is not really absent from the traditional Chinese literary criticism, as widely believed among modern sinologists. However, before we can close this discussion, I have to admit once again that I am not arguing that the Chinese literary tradition and the Western tradition of literary criticism followed the same pattern; nor am I trying to claim that mimesis in the early Chinese criticism is identical to that from Aristotle. I only feel

obliged to point out the fact that there was a very strong tendency in early China to use poetry, like history, as a "mirror" that represents the reality truthfully so that it can provide useful lessons for the generations to come.

Notes

[1] Although it has never been established that the "Great Preface" was from the hands of one single person, for the sake of convenience, I am going to use a singular form when I refer to the author(s) of the "Prefaces." For a detailed discussion on the authorship of the "Prefaces," please refer to Zhao Peilin 趙沛霖, *Shijing Yanjiu Fansi* (詩經研究反思, *Retrospection on the Shijing Studies).* (Tianjing: Tianjing Education Press, 1989) 249-269.

[2] Among the available English translations of the "Great Preface," I find that James Liu's is perhaps the most accurate and easist to read. Unfortunately, I cannot find his translation of the "Preface" in its entirety. Therefore, where Liu's translation is available, I will use his; for those passages for which I cannot find a translation from Liu, I will try to supply one of my own.

[3] Very often called *Ji* (稷), the god of grains worshipped by ancient Chinese people. His mythological story is told in the poem, "Shengmin 生民," in the *da ya* section of the *Shijing*. *Ji* (稷) is generally taken to mean millet, which was probably the first type of crops ancient Chinese people learned to grow, and which may also explain why the god of grains is called Hou Ji (后稷, literally, after millet).

[4] Gong Liu (公六) is believed to be one of the great kings of the early Zhou. His heroic deeds are told in the poem "Gong Liu," in the *Da Ya* section of the *Shijing*.

[5] Although Legge's translations tend to be awkward and difficult to read, his is the only reliable translation of the "Minor Prefaces" that I can find. Therefore I will use it for now. The only changes I made of his translation is changing the old system of Romanizing Chinese proper names into the *Pinying* system.

[6] English translation from Xu Yuanchong 許淵冲. 詩經 *The Book of Poetry*. (Changsha: Huan Press, 1993) 79. I have changed Xu's translation of the title of the poem from "Complaint of a Duchess" to "The New Tower," which is a more literal interpretation.

[7] D. C. Lau's translation. Instead of page number, the conventional way employed by sinologists to mark quotations from Confucius's *Analects* is followed. The two numbers separated by "." refers, respectively and in this order, to the book number and paragraph number of the saying.

[8] Wong's original translation is: "And the 'narrative-descriptive' involves the direct reporting of a situation, with some of the hidden senses one wishes to convey lodged in one's description of objects of nature." In the original Chinese sentence, "直書其事，寓言寫物，賦也," "reporting directly a situation" and "depicting objects" are two parallel actions expressed in two compound clauses, but Wong subordinates the latter to the former. Therefore, I ventured to alter slightly the second part of his translation as it stands in the quotation.

[9] These statistics can be found in Xie Zhen's *Siming Shihua* 四溟詩話(*Remarks on Poetry from Siming*), vol. 2. According to Xie's statistics, *fu* is used in 720 stanzas of the 305 poems; *xing* is used in 370 stanzas and *bi* is only used in 110 stanzas.

[10] For a detailed description of the development of traditional theories on the *liuyi* (六義), please refer to Zhao Peilin. *Shijing Yanjiu Fansi* (詩經研究反思, *Retrospection on the Shijing Studies).* (Tianjing: Tianjing Education Press, 1989) 209-224.

Chapter 4

The Debate on *Xingsi* and *Shens*

One of the major topics that engaged almost every generation of Chinese literary and fine arts elite in the past two millennia is the relationship between *xingsi* 形似 and *shensi* 神似 and their respective and relative importance in both fine arts and literature. *Xingsi* literally means *resemblance in physical forms/appearances*. Simply and generally stated, *xingsi* theory demands that a literary work or painting representation of something, a natural object, a person, or a landscape, etc., should resemble it in its physical aspects as it really is or was. The ancient Chinese, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, first believed, just as Plato believed, that producing physical resemblance is what painting does. But starting from the Han periods, the Chinese started to realize that it is not enough to merely represent something in its physical forms, because the most important aspect of anything is not its physical form but its inner principles, laws, its essence. Therefore, the *shensi* theory started to play a more important role in fine arts and literary criticism. The term *shensi*, literally meaning *resemblance in spirit/essence*, still stresses *resemblance* to the original, but in spirit and inner principles. It demands that a literary or artwork should not only represent the physical forms but also depict, by means of physical forms, those internal and invisible aspects that make something/someone essentially different from anything/anybody else. As we can easily tell, the prerequisite of both *xingsi* and *shensi* is *resemblance* (*si* 似), albeit in different aspects. Together, they clearly suggest a strong mimetic tendency in Chinese theories of literature and fine arts.

Some modern scholars of Chinese art and literary theories, however, most often stress that traditional Chinese artists and literary people neglected *xingsi* in favor of

shensi. Scholars such as Chen Liangyun (1991), Wu Lifu 伍蠡甫(1983), Qi Zhixiang (1993), Zheng Yuyu 鄭毓瑜 (1988) believe that the requirement of *shensi* reveals more of an expressive theory, while others, James Liu (1975), for example, read a metaphysical theory into it.

Therefore, I propose to have a detailed examination of the ancient Chinese debate on *xingsi* and *shensi* with the intention to clarify the traditional Chinese views on the respective meaning of the two categories and their relative position in art and literature. I will start with a brief discussion of the ancient Chinese philosophical views on the relationship of *xing*, that is, physical form, and *shen*, that is, spirit or essence, and these views' influence on the Chinese attitude toward *xingsi* and *shensi* in fine arts and literary theories. I will then examine the development of these two theories in both fine arts theory and literary theory and demonstrate, firstly, that *xingsi* and *shensi* had not been seen, by the early Chinese, as mutually exclusive. In no time of Chinese history, except occasionally during recent centuries, was the *shensi* theory emphasized to such an extent that it excluded *xingsi* as its basis. Secondly, *shensi* does not really mean non-mimetic or un-mimetic; nor does it necessarily suggest a metaphysical or expressive theory, as the above-mentioned modern scholars tend to suggest. It is true that traditional Chinese scholars stressed the importance of *shen* in both fine arts and literary works and they were ready to modify the physical form in order to best represent the spirit/essence. By the term *shen*, however, they seldom referred to the subjective *shen* of the artist or poet, nor were they talking about *shen* on the metaphysical level. By *shensi*, it is simply meant that a literary or art work should *resemble (si 似)* what it is trying to depict/represent. Only it should not stop at the

physical level; rather, art and literary works should strive for a resemblance in essence and spirit. It would be right to claim that *shensi* theory requires more than "a literal copy," but to insist that it excludes *mimesis* is erroneous. This demand of *resemblance in essence/spirit* is, in fact, quite resonant with Aristotle's demand of *mimesis*.

I. Chinese Philosophical Attitudes on the Relationship Between *xing* and *shen*

The meaning of the term *xing* 形 is very simple: the physical form of a natural object or human being. The term *shen* 神, on the other hand, needs some explanation. The Chinese character *shen* 神 is one of the most ancient pictographs. According to the Han lexicographer Xu Shen's 許慎 (30-124) *Explanation of Writing and Analysis of Characters* (*shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), "*shen* means that with which Heaven creates everything. It consists of the character *shi* 示 and the character *shen* 申." Xu Shen explained *shen* 申 as follows: "*Shen* is the same as *dian* 電," which means lightning flashes. According to the research of Yang Shuda 楊樹達, during very ancient times the character for *shen* 神, *shen* 申 and *dian* 電 were originally the same character. To the ancient people, there is nothing stranger and harder to understand than lightning flashes; therefore, they used the character for lightning to refer to all other mysterious natural phenomena which they could not rationally explain, such as the creation of the myriad things in nature[1]. Then in classical works such as the *Book of Changes, Zhuang Zi, Xun Zi, Guan Zi,* the term *shen* was developed and applied not only to the natural world but also human beings[2]. When used in connection with the natural world, it

usually means, in Chen Liangyun's words, "the natural principles, laws, patterns hidden in the natural objects and phenomena living or happening between Heaven and Earth" (1991:241). When applied to a person, it originally may only have referred to the human faculty, which enables man to comprehend the mysterious natural phenomena: their patterns, laws and dynamics. But when we look at the way the term is used in the various works before and during the Han Dynasties (206 BCE-220), the *shen* of a person seems to refer to the internal aspects, which make a person alive and what he or she is. It can be roughly translated as "spirit" or "essence" or even "soul."

When ancient philosophers discussed the relationship between *xing* and *shen*, they usually talked about them in relation to human beings. First of all, they generally believed that *xing* and *shen* are two mutually dependent aspects found in any thing or living being that has a physical form. As Xun Zi 荀子(330 BCE – 230 BEC?) puts it, "when the physical body is formed, the *shen* is also born" ("On Nature," *Xun Zi* 荀子-天論). Secondly, *shen* is the more important of the two aspects. This tradition of promoting *shen* while demoting *xing* started, just as many other great ideas in China, with Zhuang Zi. In spite of his far-reached influence on later *xingsi* and *shensi* theories in art and literary theories, Zhuang Zi does not have a specific chapter dedicated especially to the relationship between *xing* and *shen*. As usual, Zhuang Zi conveys his idea on this issue through those interesting fables scattered in many of the Inner and Outer Chapters. For example, in "Zai You 在宥," the relation between *xing* and *shen* is illustrated in the fictional conversation between the Yellow Emperor and a sage called Guang Chengzi 廣成子. The Yellow Emperor had come to ask Guang Chengzi about

the Dao of life. Guang Chengzi told the Yellow Emperor that as an emperor ruling over the people, the Yellow Emperor was not good enough to discuss Dao with him. The Yellow Emperor went back, gave away his throne, built himself a little hut and lived there alone for three months. Now he was back:

> Guang Chengzi was lying on his bed, with his face towards the south [as if he were the emperor]. The Yellow Emperor bent down his head and walked in on his knees. He bowed twice and said to Guang Chengzi:
>
> "Master, I heard that you have grasped the perfect Dao. May I be bold enough to ask how could one maintain one's body (*xing* 形) so that one can live long?"
>
> Guang Chengzi suddenly sat up and said:
>
> "What an excellent question! Come, let me tell you about Dao. ... Avoid seeing and avoid hearing. Keep your spirit (*shen* 神) in quietude, your body will automatically stay healthy. Stay still and stay clear. Do not tire your body; do not churn up your essence (*jing* 精). Only thus could you live a long life. When your eyes do not [attempt to] see, your ears do not [attempt to] listen and your heart/mind does not [strive to] know, your spirit will stay with your body. Thus, the body will enjoy longevity." ("Let It Be, Leave It Alone" "Zai You," *Zhuang Zi* 莊子-在宥, 119-120)[3]

This fable indicates that, to Zhuang Zi, a person, just like other things in Nature, has two components: bodily form and the quintessential spirit. A person only lives as long as the spirit stays with the body. Death results when the spirit is exhausted. Therefore, it is imperative that we keep the spirit strong by not laboring it. Of the two aspects, *shen* is obviously the more important. Not only the life of the bodily form relies on it, a person's virtue and attraction to fellow human beings also spring from his/her *shen*. Zhuang Zi seems to be consciously conveying this point throughout the chapters, because we find most of the characters with great virtues are deformed in one way or another. The best example that pertains to the relationship between *shen* and *xing* is

perhaps the story about Ai-Tai the Hunch Back. The story is a bit long to quote, but because of its interest, I will cite it in full:

> Duke Ai of Lu said to Confucius: "In Wei there was an ugly man, named Ai-Tai the Hunch Back. When men were around him, they thought only of him and couldn't break away, and when women saw him, they ran begging to their fathers and mothers, saying, "I'd rather be this gentleman's concubine than any other man's wife!' – there have been more than ten such cases and there is no sign for this to stop yet. However, no one ever heard him take the lead [in discussions] – he always just chimed in with other people. He wasn't in the position of a ruler where he could save men's lives, and he had no store of provisions to fill men's bellies. On top of that, he was ugly enough to astound the whole world. 'Chimed in but never led, and know no more than what went on right around him. And yet men and women flocked to him. He certainly must be different from other men', I thought, and I summoned him so I could have a look. Just as they said – he was ugly enough to astound the world. But he hadn't been with me for even a whole month before I started to like him. Before the year was out, I had grown to trust him. [At the time,] I didn't have a chief minister, and I appointed him as my chief minister. But he was vague about accepting it, evasive, as though he hoped to be left off; and I was embarrassed, but in the end I turned the state over to him. Then before I knew it, he left me and went away. I felt completely crushed, as though I'd suffered a great loss and didn't have anyone left to enjoy my state with. What kind of man is he anyway?"
>
> Confucius replied, "I once went on a mission to Chu; on the way, I saw some little pigs nursing at the body of their dead mother. After a while, they gave a start and all ran away from the body. [They ran away,] because they could no longer see their likeness in her; she was not the same as she had been before. In loving their mother, they loved not her bodily form but that which made her bodily form alive." ("The Sign of Virtue Complete" "De Chongfu," *Zhuang Zi* 莊子-德充符, 73)

This story seems to suggest that real beauty is not that of the physical form. Real beauty lies in the internal beauty of virtue, the greatness of personality. Confucius's answer suggests that physical form is nothing but a place where the essence of life, the spirit, and virtue of a person lodge. Once the essence or spirit of a person, a pig or any other living being is gone, the body is dead and its life and beauty are no more. In many other

similar fables, Zhuang Zi actually points out that bodily ugliness means nothing if a person/thing is beautiful internally:

> "Mr. Lame-Hunchback-No-Lips talked to Duke Ling of Wei and Duke Ling was so pleased with him that when he looked at normal men he thought their necks looked to lean and skinny. Mr. Pitcher-Sized-Wen talked to Duke Huan of Qi, and Duke Huan was so pleased with him that when he looked at normal men he thought their necks looked too lean and skinny. Therefore, if virtue is preeminent, the bodily deformities will be forgotten." ("The Sign of Virtue Complete" "De Chongfu," *Zhuang Zi* 莊子-德充符, 74)

Zhuang Zhi's theory on the importance of *shen* was generally accepted and echoed by other later philosophers. Liu An 劉安 (179 BCE-122 BCE) claims in his *Huai Nan Zi* 淮南子 that "the heart (*xin* 心) is the master of the body (*xing* 形). However, the spirit (*shen* 神) is the treasure of the heart." He came to the conclusion that *shen is* more important than *xing* through a very practical reasoning: "The emperor owns thousands of soldiers. [When they were killed in battles, we] buried their bodies in the wilderness, but we would honor their ghosts/spirits in bright temples. From this we know that *shen* is more important than bodily form" ("Jingshen Xun" 精神訓).

However, the emphasis on the ruling importance of *shen* does not exclude the necessity or importance of *xing*. Even Zhuang Zi viewed *xing* as an important factor of life. He advises: "Do not tire your body; do not churn up your essence" so that "your spirit will stay with your body" (*Zhuang Zi*, "Zai You"). Si-ma Qian 司馬遷 (145 BCE - 90 BCE) in the preface to his own *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) makes the idea even clearer:

> While *shen* is what makes a person alive, *xing* is where life dwells. When *shen* is greatly toiled, it gets exhausted. When *xing* is greatly labored, it gets worn out. When *xing* and *shen* separate from each other, death results. Once dead, [a person] cannot come to life again. Once separated, [*xing* and *shen*] cannot come together again. That is why the great sages treasure them [both]. Therefore we may conclude that *shen* is the essence (*ben* 本) of life while *xing* is its form. ("Preface to *Shiji*" *Taishigong zixue* 太史公自序)

Liu An, in spite of his clear emphasis on the ruling importance of *shen*, also shared the same idea as Si-ma Qian and Zhuang Zi about the importance of *xing*:

> *Xing* is the house of life; *qi* 氣 (vital energy/breath) is the substance of life; *shen* is the ruler of life. Any one of the three is out of order, all of them will be hurt." ("Yuan Dao Xun," *Huai Nan Zi* 淮南子- 原道训)

From these discussions, it is clear that the ancient Chinese philosophers generally did not believe that *shen* can exist without a physical form as its dwelling place. On the contrary, life only lasts as long as *shen* and *xing* are organically united. One cannot live without the other. It is not that *xing* is not important, but only that it is not *as important as shen*.

However, with the introduction of Indian Buddhism into China during the first century came the belief that the *shen* of a person never dies[4]. This belief may have formed, as Qi Zhixiang (1993:230) suggests, the philosophical foundation for those few later painters, such as Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-1374) of the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368), who emphasize the importance of *shensi* even to the degree of neglecting *xingshi*. However, the introduction of this Buddhist belief triggered a large-scale debate on whether *shen* dies or not. Many philosophers thought the idea ridiculous. The most representative work that attacks the idea is perhaps Fan Zhen's 范缜 (450-515) *Shen Dies* (*Shen Mie Lun* 神滅論) in which Fan Zhen concludes that

> *shen* is also *xing*; *xing* is also *shen*. Therefore, when *xing* exists, *shen* also exists. When *xing* withers, *shen* dies. *Xing* and *shen* may be united or separated. When they are untied, they become one. When they are separated, then *xing* dies and *shen* disappears. (*Shen Dies Shen Mie Lun* 神滅論)[5]

In spite of the popularity of Buddhism in China, Chinese philosophers generally did not believe that *shen* can exist in a void without a physical form. Most Chinese painters and poets, as we shall see, also seemed to have taken this stand when they treat the relationship between *shensi* and *xingsi* in painting.

II. The Problem of *Xingsi* and *Shensi* in Painting

From Plato's accusation against the painters in his *Republic* (III, X), we may conclude that the ancient Greeks first believed that to paint is to represent physical forms or external appearances. The initial understanding of painting among the ancient Chinese was no different either. That this is so is evident from the Chinese definitions for painting found in various classical works:

> Painting means physical forms 畫形也. (*Er Ya* 爾雅)
> To paint means to represent in resemblance 畫類也. (*Guang Ya* 廣雅)
> To paint is to show. It means to show the images of things with colors 畫挂也, 以彩色挂物象也. (*Shi Ming* 釋名)

From these early definitions of painting, we may deduce three characteristics of early Chinese understanding of painting: first, painting represents physical forms; second, painting is mimetic because it represents using resemblance; third, painting represents with colors. It is worth noting here that in all these early definitions there is no mention of *shen* as a necessary element of painting. Such an early Chinese view on painting is also evident from various anecdotes on painters and paintings recorded in the classical

works. For example, the following interesting discussion on painting is found in *Han Fei Zi* (韓非子 ?- 233 BCE):

> There was once a painter working for the King of Qi. The King of Qi asked him: "What is the most difficult thing to paint?" [The painter] replied: "[animals such as] dogs and horses are the most difficult to paint." "What is the easiest to paint, then?" [The painter] replied: "ghosts and devils." Well, dogs and horses are things familiar to everybody. [People] see these animals day and night. [the painter] has to paint them in exact likeness, therefore, it is difficult. [On the other hand,] ghosts and devils are invisible. Nobody has ever seen them. Therefore, it is easy to paint them ("Outer Collected Discussions." *wai chushuo zuo shang* 外儲說左上)

Due to his deep-rooted pragmatism, Han Fei, similar to Plato, had a strong animosity against painters and literary people, because he believed that paintings, as well as music, are useless. In the passage quoted above, his real purpose was to show that painters are really no good, even at their own profession, because most painters can only draw things such as ghosts, for which there is no concrete criteria to judge the degree of resemblance to the original. In his opinion, few painters could draw dogs and horses well because the original is just in front of the eyes and everybody can easily judge the quality of the painting. Although Han Fei's real intention in this discussion is, as he usually does, to attack the painters, it is clear that the general standards during Han Fei's time to evaluate a painting is whether it resembles the original in physical form. This remained the major standard for a long time. Even as late as the fifth century A.D. some scholars still believed that painting was to represent the physical forms. For example, Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 wrote to Wang Wei 王微 (?-453) the famous painter and art theorist (not the famous Tang poet and landscape painter Wang Wei 王維) and claimed:

> Picture as recording vehicle (*tuzai* 圖載) includes the following three categories: The first refers to "pictures conveying principles (*tuli* 圖理);" the images of the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Changes* belong to this category. The second category is called "pictures that express meanings (*tushi* 圖識)," which consists of the writing symbols. The third category is called "picture that represents forms (*tuxing* 圖形)," which refers to painting.[6]

However, the Chinese have been a very practical people. Painting, just like poetry, has to serve some pragmatic purpose, otherwise it would, indeed, be a waste of time as Han Fei had fiercely claimed. Therefore, during the Han periods, painting was used as another means, along side with writings, for moral uplifting. Most paintings from the Han periods are images and stories of great sages and former kings, intended as illustration of great virtues. Based on this tradition, later scholars started to glorify painting by raising it to the same position as literary writings. For example, Lu Ji 陸機 (263-303), who is otherwise known for his *Fu on Literary Writing* (*wen fu* 文賦), claims that "The flourishing of painting can be compared to the creation of *Ya* and *Song* poems (that is, *the Book of Poetry*). [They are both created to] glorify the fragrance of achievements [of great kings]. There is nothing more effective in describing things than words; and there is nothing more effective in preserving forms than painting."[7] Lu Ji's glorification of painting was generally accepted and elaborated by later orthodox scholars throughout the later dynasties. The best footnote to Lu Ji's view on painting came, perhaps, from the famous Tang Dynasty scholar on painting, Zhang Yanyuan 張延逮, who started the "the Origin of painting" section of his *A Record of Painting Masterpieces of Previous Dynasties* (*lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記) by stating that painting can be used as a tool for moral rectification and strengthening family relations,

and that it has the same function as the six classics and operates in the same way as the four seasons. This is indeed the highest position a Confucian can ever give to anything. Zhang Yanyuan then traces the various ancient definitions of painting, which we quoted earlier, and ends his discussion on the origin of painting by concluding that

> Biographical records can be used to narrate their (that is, great sages and former kings') deeds/events (*shi* 事), but they are not capable of representing their forms (*xing* 形). *Fu* and *Song* poems can be used to sing their glories, but they are not capable of preserving their images. When painting came into being, it provided the capability of both [biographical records and poetry]. This is exactly what Lu Ji meant when he once remarked: 'The flourishing of painting can be compared to the creation of *Ya* and *Song* poems (that is, *the Book of Poetry*). [They are both created to] glorify the fragrance of achievements [of great kings]. There is nothing more effective in describing things than words; and there is nothing more effective in preserving forms than painting.'[8] ("The Origin of Painting" *lun hua zhi yuanliu* 論畫之源流)[9]

Even in such glorifications the most outstanding feature of painting is still deemed to be its ability to represent physical forms (*xing*).

However, it is important to note that Zhang Yanyuan's conclusion about the most outstanding feature of painting is made in relation to literary writing. While Zhang Yanyuan believed that the goal of painting is to represent things (*wu*, including natural objects, animals, as well as human beings and human events), he did not suggest that painting should only represent the appearance of things. Since the early Han period, the Chinese view on the nature of painting had already started to develop toward the direction of emphasizing *shensi*. The earliest known written comment that emphasizes the importance of capturing the *shen* of the subject-matter in painting is found in Liu An's 劉安 (179 – 122 BCE) Huai Nan Zi:

> If the face of the famous beauty, Xishi, is painted beautiful but not pleasant, or if the eyes of the frightening Mengfen are painted very big but not threatening, [the painter] failed to represent that which rules over the physical form (*shuoshan xun* 说山训).

As we recall, Liu An, like many other ancient Chinese philosophers before and after him, believed that "*xing* (bodily form) is the house of life, *qi* (vital energy/breath) is the substance of life; *shen* (spirit) is the ruler of life" (*Yuandao xun* 原道训). Therefore, the phrase, "that which rules over the physical form," obviously refers to *shen* – specifically, the *shen* of a person. The face of Xishi in reality was not only beautiful but also, and more importantly, pleasant. Beautiful, to Liu An, is a physical feature of *Xishi's* face, which can be easily represented with lines and colors. Pleasant is the ultimate feeling that *Xishi* gave other people, which is really why people appreciated her beautiful face. The same goes with the eyes of *Mengfen*: His eyes were physically big indeed, but that was not how people felt when they first saw his eyes. People felt frightened by the eyes when they saw them. Painting should represent reality truthfully. So the ultimate goal of painting Mengfen's eyes is to make the viewers of the painting feel the fear that they actually had when they saw the real person of Mengfen. To achieve this goal, a painting needs to represent not only the physical form, but also its *shen*. Given Liu An's acute philosophical awareness of the existence and importance of *shen*, it is natural that *shen* would become an important factor in his evaluation of paintings.

However, the *shensi* theory did not become prominent among painters until the Jin period (265-420). The first known person, after Liu An, who contributed greatly to the prominence of the *shensi* theory in Chinese painting during this period is Gu Kaizhi 顾

凱之 (344-405). Although Gu Kaizhi has been known to be the very first person in Chinese painting history who dedicated special essays on painting, his influence upon Chinese painting and painting theories has come more from a few anecdotes about his painting activities. The most often quoted by scholars throughout the later dynasties including the current one, is the following story recorded by Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (404-444) (*New Remarks on the World shishuo xinyu* 世說新語): Gu Kaizhi was very skillful in his figure painting. Once when he painted the image of a person, he first finished every part of the image, except the eyes, which he did not paint until a few years later. When asked why he did that, he replied: "The body and limbs, whether they are [painted] beautiful or ugly, are not crucial to the painting. [The secret of] capturing the *shen* [of the person] lies exactly in the eyes" ("Skillful Arts" 巧藝, *New Remarks*). From our modern perspective, we might joke with Chen Chuanxi 陳傳席 (1991:17) that Gu Kaizhi was probably not as good a painter as he has been credited to be, otherwise it would not have taken him a few years to paint a pair of eyes, and the answer he gave might simply be an excuse for his inferior painting skills. Seriously, however, his reply reveals his unprecedented understanding and practical knowledge of painting. Through this seemingly simple statement, Gu Kaizhi not only points out the importance of *shensi* in figure painting, but also provides some practical advice on how to achieve *shensi* in figure paintings. Most of those painters and painting critics who talked about the relationship between *shensi* and *shenxi* have been directly influenced by Gu Kaizhi's theory.

The next great painter and painting theorist who developed Gu Kaizhi's *shensi* theory in figure painting is Xie He 謝赫 (375-443), who helped to make *shensi* theory the most important principle in Chinese painting with his "six aspects (*Liufa* 六法)[10]" of painting. The six aspects are six criteria that Xie He employed, in his *Classes of Ancient Painters* (*Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄), as the criteria to evaluate and classify painters before him. He listed and explained the "six aspects" at the very beginning of the book as follows:

> There are six aspects in painting. From ancient times, painters have been known to be skillful at one aspect or other. However, we can rarely find someone who is good at every aspect.
>
> What are the six aspects anyway? The first is call *qiyun*, 氣韵 (literally, energy/breath and bearing) that is, "lively and moving." The second is called "*gufa*" 骨法 (literally, bone structures), that is, "techniques of using the brush." The third is called *yingwu* 應物 (literally, observe and respond to objects), that is, representing physical forms. The fourth is called "*suilei*" 隨類 (literally, following resemblance), that is, coloring [with a color that resembles the original]. The fifth is called *jingying* 經營 (literally, arrangement), that is, planning the position of objects in the painting. The sixth is called *chuanyi* 傳移 (copying), that is, imitating paintings [of former great painters]. (*Classes of Ancient Painters Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄)

Most of the six aspects are reasonably clear from Xie He's original text. The first, *qiyun*, however, needs further explanation. As Jiang Kongyang (1991:128) demonstrates, *qiyun* has usually been understood by later painters to mean the same as Gu Kaizhi's idea of *shen*. Most modern Chinese scholars agree with this explanation. For example, Chen Chuanxi remarks, in his annotation to Xie He's *Classes of Ancient Painters*, that "the term *shen* in Gu Kaizhi's phrase 'capturing the *shen*', in effect, is the same as [Xie He's] *qiyun*" (1991:201). As I have pointed out, when ancient Chinese philosophers

discussed *shen*, they usually approached it on an abstract level. The *shen* of a person in the early Chinese philosophical discussions usually refers to the internal aspects which make a person alive and what he or she is. It can be roughly translated as "spirit" or "essence" or even "soul." In the context of figure painting theory, however, this abstract meaning seems to have been developed into something more tangible, through Xie He's term *qiyun*.

Etymologically, the word q*iyun* is a compound word consisting of the word *qi* 氣 and the word *yun* 韻. The term *qi*, as we have seen from Liu An's discussion on the interrelations between *xing, qi* and *shen*, was believed by the ancient Chinese to be the substance of life, which fills the physical body of a person. While the ancient Greeks believed that a person's disposition and general health were determined by the relative proportions, in the body, of the four fluids, viz., blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile, the ancient Chinese believed that a person's *qi* is the one that is responsible. The term *yun*, as Huang Baozhen and Cai Zhongxiang, *et al.*, point out, "originally meant harmonious sounds and was explained as 'when similar sounds echo each other, we call it *yun*.' Later, the term was borrowed to describe pleasant and beautiful words in writing.... During the Wei and Jin period, the term *yun* was also borrowed to evaluate personalities" (1987:vol. 2, 261). When applied to personality evaluation, the term *qiyun* includes "both the physical and inner aspects of a person" (1987:vol. 2, 261). According to Chen Chuanxi (1991:200), the term *qiyun* in personality evaluation refers to the manifestation of a person's inner state of mind through his/her physical body and postures. Generally speaking, it roughly includes the meanings of all such English words as bearing, disposition, character, personality, inner state of mind, and spirit of a

person. Given the popularity of the practice of personality evolution during the Wei and Jin period, modern scholars (Jiang Kongyang, 1991; Huang Baozhen *et al.*, 1987; Chen Chuanxi, 1991) generally agree that Xie He borrowed the term *qiyun* from personality evolution. Therefore, *qiyun*, and by implication, *shen*, when applied to figure painting, generally refers to the disposition, personality, inner state of mind as well as the bearing of the person being painted. In other words, to "capture the *shen*" or to represent the *qiyun* of a person in a "lively and moving" manner means to represent the physical body and posture of the person in such a way that the painting not only shows a clear resemblance to the physical form of the person, but also and more importantly, reveals the person's inner qualities so that the painting may appear to the viewers as full of life and provides the illusion that the figure in the painting is actually alive and moving as if real.

After Gu Kaizhi and Xie He, capturing the *shen* or *qiyun* of a person become the first and foremost goal of every Chinese figure painter. The reasons behind the popularity of *shensi* in figure painting seem to include the following: Philosophically, the ancient Chinese, as we have demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, believed that the *shen* of a person is the master of the bodily form. Pragmatically, as we mentioned earlier, the orthodox Confucian scholars believed that painting, like literary writings, serves as a means of moral rectification. Thus, it is not enough for a figure painting merely to represent the bodily form; it has to reveal what is good and evil, just as one Song Dynasty painter, Chen Yu 陳郁 adivised:

> When painting the image of a person, we should also represent the person's spirit. To represent the spirit of a person, we must represent the person's mind. Otherwise how can we tell what's good from what's evil, and what's noble

> from what's humble, since a gentleman and a small person may have the same physical appearance, although their minds are completely opposite? ("On Describing the Heart" *lun xiexin* 論寫心)

To serve its pragmatic purpose, figure painting has to go beyond the physical form and manifest the inner qualities of good and evil persons. Chen Yu's advice also indicates a third reason for the figure painters to emphasize *shensi*. We may call this the practical reason: many painters like Chen Yu noticed, from their practical experience, that different people may resemble each other physically, but they can be easily differentiated in reality by their characters, personalities and actions. Such as the noble and ignoble persons that Chen Yu refers to in the above-quoted passage. Also, even the same person may appear physically different at different times without any change in their personality and disposition. For example, a Qing Dynasty painter, Shen Zongqian 沈宗騫 in his *Jiezhou's Experiences of Learning to Paint* (*jiezhou xuehua bian* 芥舟學畫編) makes this point very clearly when he explains why painters should go beyond mere physical form:

> Of the categories of painting, there are many. However, figure painting that captures *shen* (*chuanshen xiezhao* 傳神寫照) is the most ancient. [It became the first category of painting,] because it is capable of capturing the *shen* of the ancient sages and former kings so that their *shen* can be passed on to later generations. [Figure painting] is named with the word *shen*, instead of *xing or mao* 貌(appearance) because there may be people who look alike in their *xing*, or in their *mao*, but two persons will never be the same in their *shen*. If the painter merely strives for *xingsi* (physical resemblance), then there might be another person who looks exactly alike even among a small group of several dozens of people. How can [such a painting] reveal the *shen* [of the person painted]? Moreover, suppose there is a person whom we know. Last time we saw him, he was fat but he has now lost weight and become lean. His complexion was creamy, but now he is pale. He didn't have a beard but now he has grown not only a big beard but also side-burns. When we unexpectedly

> see him again, we may not be able to recognize him right away. But at the second look, we will suddenly recognize him and say: Aha! This is Mr. So-and-so. The reason that we can recognize him [in spite of all the physical changes] is because although his bodily form may change, his *shen* does not. Therefore, it might be acceptable [for the painting] to go amiss a little in physical resemblance. However, if the *shen* is missed even by a tiny bit, [the painting] will look completely like another person. ("An Overview on Capturing the *Shen*," *chuanshen zonglun* 傳神總論)

The major goal of a figure painting in the Chinese tradition, like in the West, is that the painting should suggest an unmistakable resemblance to the real person. Since the only way to differentiate a person in reality is through the *shen* of the person as manifested through his/her physical aspects, it is natural that the Chinese painters should consider whether a figure painting clearly suggests a resemblance to the real person in spirit and personality as a dividing line between great painters and those who are not so great. There is no doubt that many ancient Chinese painters were willing to sacrifice physical resemblance to a certain degree, as Shen Zongqian suggests in the conclusion of the passage quoted above; we will come back to this point later. For the moment, however, it is very important for us to note that *shensi* in figure painting does not exclude the requirements of *xingsi*.

No major Chinese painter has ever claimed that the *shen* of a person can be represented in an abstract form without relying upon a clear resemblance of the person's physical features. On the contrary, the *shen* can only be conveyed through the physical form of the person painted. For example, the most often quoted phrase from Gu Kaizhi, besides his claim that "the secret of conveying the *shen* lies in the [the way] eyes [are painted]," is "to convey *shen* with physical form" ("Comments on Well-known paintings of the Wei and Jin" 魏晉勝流畫贊). From the "six aspects of

painting," we can clearly see that x*ingsi* was also unmistakably important to Xie He. The first aspect, *qiyun*, by definition, is closely related to the physical features of a person, because it refers, as we have seen, to the inner qualities of a person as shown through the bodily form and postures. Without physical form, there is no way to represent the inner qualities. That is why two major aspects in Xie He's "six aspects" of painting are directly related to physical resemblance, namely, the second aspect: "*yingwu* (responding to objects/things), that is, resembling physical forms" and the fourth: "*suilei,* (literally following resemblance) that is, coloring [with a color that resembles the original]." Even the second, "*gufa*" is more or less concerned with representing the physical form: *gufa* was another term used very often in personality evaluation during the Han, Wei and Jin periods and it refers to the bone structure of a person. The ancient Chinese believed that the bone structure of a person is a very good indication of the kind of person he/she is or will be, as well as the fortune of the person. Although Xie He's brief explanation of *gufa* in painting indicates that it chiefly refers to "brush techniques" and "should be interpreted as brush lines on the painting that presents the physical structure of the person or object painted," the end goal of brush techniques, as Chen Chuanxi (1991:202) suggests, is to represent physical forms and make the image in the painting appear to be alive and moving.

Another point that I would like to mention here is that the *shen* or *qiyun* in painting does not refer to the *shen* or *qiyun* of the painter but those of the painted. This seems extremely clear from our previous discussions, and I may appear to be foolishly stating the obvious. However, certain modern Chinese scholars sometimes tend to suggest that Chinese painting is all about expressing the painter's own thoughts and

feelings and the images in the painting are simply a means toward that end. Some modern scholars would even attempt to read this into Gu Kaizhi's painting theory, which is clearly mimetic. For example, Gu Kaizhi observes, in the beginning of his "Evaluation of Paintings" (*lunhua* 論畫) that

> [a]mong [the subject-matter of] paintings, human beings are the most difficult to paint. The second most difficult is landscape; then come animals such as dogs and horses. As to [inanimate] things such as high stages and buildings, they may require more time to paint, but it is also easy to achieve good results, because such [inanimate] things have fixed dimensions. [Painting such Inanimate things] does not involve the painter's dynamic thinking and imagination to understand any quintessential spirit (*qianxiang miaode* 遷想妙得) [, because they don't have any]. Paintings of inanimate things simply require accurate calculation; therefore, such paintings cannot be [and are not] used as criteria to classify painters.

With this passage, Gu Kaizhi is really explaining his criteria in selecting the paintings he is going to evaluate next. He offers no comments on any paintings of inanimate things because painting such things involves only measurements and mathematic calculations, which is more of a technique than an art. Unlike inanimate things such as buildings, people and other animals, on the other hand, have life and therefore they all have their *shen*. To capture the *shen* of a person, or any other living being, is not an easy task, because *shen* is abstract and there are no concrete measurements or dimensions to rely on. It involves the painter's active intellectual participation. This is exactly what Gu Kaizhi means by *qianxiang*. *Qian* literally means moving positions. *Qianxiang* means to observe, think, or imagine the subject in different situations or from different angles in order to understand its nature. Or as Sui Dongpo 蘇東坡(1037-1101) will later advise, "the essence of figure painting lies in capturing the person's

tian 天 (nature). To achieve this, [the painter] should secretly observe the person in actions among other people" ("On Capturing *shen*" *chuanshen lun* 傳神論). However, some modern commentators, Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 for instance, interpret Gu Kaizhi's phrase, *qianxiang miaode*, as to mean that "the painter first transfers his/her own thoughts into the object of the painting in order to intimately feel the object's thoughts and feelings. ... Once the painter has understood the object's feelings and thoughts and its outstanding characteristics, the painter retrieves his/her own thoughts back to his/her own person... in this manner, the painter's own thoughts and feelings are skillfully merged into the painting."[11] Yet, in Gu Kaizhi's original discussion, as we can see, there is no mention about the emotions or feelings of the painter at all. No wonder critics like Chen Chuanxi would dismiss such readings as "meanings read into the original texts. They are groundless interpretations" (1991:51).

There are some other modern Chinese scholars who, while accepting that *shen* and *qiyun* refer to the *shen* and *qiyun* of the person painted in figure painting, insist that when applied to landscape painting, *shen, qiyun* and *qi* no longer refer to the qualities of the painted, but the feelings, thoughts and ideas of the painter evoked by the beauty of natural scenery. Of these modern scholars, Wu Lifu 伍蠡甫 probably has made the most representative statement of such an expressive interpretation of *shen and qiyun*:

> Gu Kaizhi's *tongshen* 通神 (comprehending the spirit), *chuanshen* 傳神 (capturing the spirit) and Xie He's *qiyun* ... are all confined to the object or person painted. However, *qiyun* was developed in landscape painting to refer to the painter's experience of the lively images of Nature and the painter's personal feelings, thoughts and world of ideas that he forms in response to such experiences. Therefore, when landscape painting emphasizes *qiyun*, it means that the painting should reveal the painter's self. While the first and

> second aspects [viz, *qiyun* and *gufa* as proposed by Xie He] in figure painting primarily require that the painter should understand and represent the heart/mind (*xin*) of other persons, in landscape painting, however, the first two aspects require that painting expresses the painter's own response to Nature. In other words, the former [that is, figure painting] represent *wu* [that is, other people or things, events], the latter [that is, landscape painting] expresses the painter's heart through external objects. This is a shift or development from the representation of the objective world to the expression of self [as the goal of painting]; such a shift emphasizes that art requires creativity and marks a flying leap in the history of Chinese fine arts. (1983:24)

Wu Lifu's claim here makes it sound as if Chinese landscape painting has never had any tendency of representing nature. The reason for Wu Lifu, and some other scholars like him, to maintain such an expressive theory of ancient Chinese painting seems to be two-fold: First, Wu Lifu seems to believe that painting as representation does not require creativity. This belief is discernible from the last two sentences in the passage quoted above. The same belief is also clearly suggested by Wu Lifu two pages later in his comments on Jing Hao's 荊浩 theory that painting is to "paint the real." Wu Lifu observes that Jing Hao, and painters like him, treat painting as "passive representation under the slavery of Nature" (1983:26). The second reason for scholars like Wu Lifu to maintain an expressive theory seems to be that an expressive view of painting or poetry, as he concludes immediately after the above passage, "greatly added to the uniqueness of Chinese esthetics" (1983:24). As a Chinese, I am just as proud of my cultural heritage as any other Chinese could ever be. However, I find it hard to agree to such conclusions.

First of all, the belief that art as imitation or representation is passive and does not require creativity, be it in the Chinese or Western context, is, to say the least, a misguided assumption. In Chapter I of this dissertation, we have seen that art as

imitation in the West, except in Plato's accusation of the painters and poets, was generally not viewed as a passive or slavery copy of nature. It involves the artist's creativity and active intellectual and cognitive participation. It is exactly creativity, according to great scholars and poets such as Aristotle and Sidney, that marks the dividing line between historic records and artistic imitation. The ancient Chinese had the same idea; in a way, this is what the debate between *xingsi* and *shensi* has been all about. We will look into this topic in more detail later in this chapter; for now, I hope that from our previous discussions on the theory of *xingsi* and *shensi* in figure painting, it has become clear that the debate whether *shensi* or *xingsi* is more important is not really a contention between art as mimesis and art as expression. Instead, it is more a fight between art as imitation of the appearances like a passive mirror or art as imitation of what is real, including appearances and the nature that lies underneath appearances. Upon closer investigation, it is surprisingly similar to the difference between Plato's view of poetry and painting and that of Aristotle. Secondly, Wu Lifu's sweeping conclusion that "the latter [that is, landscape painting] expresses the painter's heart through external objects" seems to be more his own view as a modern scholar than the original theories of ancient scholars. So let us have a more detailed look at the theories of a few important ancient scholars on Chinese landscape painting and see whether their attitudes toward *shensi* and *xingsi* really reveal such an idea of self-expression.

The first important scholar and painter who wrote on the subject of landscape painting is Zong Bing 宗炳 (375-443), who was about three generations younger than Gu Kaizhi. While Gu Kaizhi popularized the *shensi* theory in figure painting, Zong Bing extended the same theory to landscape painting. Zong Bing was one of the most

interesting painters in traditional Chinese painting. He traveled around China his whole life visiting rivers and mountains and painting them. When he became old and could not travel any more, he painted all the great mountains and rivers which he had visited in his life on the walls of his bedroom so that he could continue to visit them and appreciate Nature's beauty even when lying in his bed. He explained, in his "Preface to Landscape Paintings" 畫山水序, that he enjoyed visiting famous mountains and great rivers because he believed that mountains and rivers manifest Dao with their physical forms (山水以形媚道). He begins the Preface thus:

> The great sages cherish Dao in order to respond to the [changes of the myriad] things; the worthy men cleanse their hearts in order to taste the [myriad] images [in Nature]. As to the mountains and rivers, in their concrete existence there exists the dynamics of Dao. That is why [great sages such as] Xuan Yuan, Yao, Confucius, Guang Chenzi, Da Kuai Shi, Xu You, Bo Yi, Shu Qi, have all made trips to great mountains such as Kong Tong, Ju Ci, Miao Gu, Shou Yan, Da Meng. That is also why it is said that "the benevolent enjoy visiting the mountains and the wise enjoy visiting rivers." The great sages imitate (that is, discover and formulate) Dao with their own *shen* so that worthy men could comprehend it. The mountains and rivers compete with each other to manifest Dao with their physical forms, therefore the benevolent enjoy visiting them. Isn't this close to the truth? ("Preface to Landscape Paintings" *hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序)

It is clear that Zong Bing's chief task in this passage is to explain why it is so important for him to visit the mountains and rivers. And the answer is obvious: because one can find Dao in the concrete forms of the mountains and rivers. Wu Lifu, however, has read a lot more into this passage by drawing some phrases in this passage out of their context. Wu Lifu claims that in Zong Bing's theory, the objective *shen* of the painted started to merge with the subjective *shen* of the painter. Here is how Wu Lifu interprets Zong Bing's theory:

> Zong Bing's theory that the landscape painter "cherish[es] Dao in order to respond to the [changes of the myriad things]" indicates that when coming into contact with Nature, [the painter] should formulate a complete subjective image (*zhuguan jingjie* 主觀境界). His phrase "*shanshui* 山水 manifest Dao with their physical forms 以形媚道" indicates that only when the painter has formulated such subjective images could he/she realize that some natural images are better able to invoke a sense of beauty than others. In other words, the painter has assumed the active role in the esthetic process; therefore, the *shen* presented through the *xing* of art works is no longer simply the essence of the object painted. Instead, it is a union of the object and the subject. It thus turns into a situation where the "idea/concept [of the painter] (*yi* 意)" rules the "*xing* [of the object]." ("Preface to Landscape paintings" *hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序)

This comment shows the first step that scholars like Wu Lifu took to force an expressive theory into the words of the ancients. In the original text, Zong Bing clearly states that "the sages cherish Dao in order to respond to the [changes of the myriad things] 聖人含道　物." In Wu Lifu comments, for no reason, the "great sages" are turned into the "painter." Among his list of the sages, Zong Bing does not even include Zhuang Zi, from whom he has obviously borrowed quite a few ideas. From the first paragraph of his Preface, we may agree that Zong Bing seems to think of himself as a wise man or a benevolent man who enjoys visiting the mountains and rivers. It is unthinkable, however, that Zong Bing, or any other ancient Chinese painter, would regard, even for a moment, himself a "sage." It is indeed a puzzle as to how Wu Lifu could turn the painter into a great sage. Yet it is even a bigger puzzle as to how the phrase "the mountains and rivers compete with each other to manifest Dao with their physical forms" indicates "a union between the object and the subject," or "a situation where the 'idea' [of the painter] rules the *xing* [of the object]." Zong Bing, as we know, is not only a Buddhist practitioner, but also a staunch believer in Daoist ideas. If he has

said, in the opening paragraph of the Preface, anything concerning the artistic creative process at all, it should be in the phrase "the worthy men cleanse their hearts to taste the [myriad] images [in Nature] (*xianzhe chenghui weixiang* 賢者澄懷味象)." This clearly echoes Lao Zi's advise that we should cleanse our mysterious mirror, that is the heart (滌除玄覽) (*Lao Zi*, X) so that it can reflect the great Dao. As we have seen in the second chapter, Zhuang Zi also advises that "the perfect man uses his heart like a mirror" (In Answering to the Emperors) and in order to keep the mirror bright, the sages always stay still and calm, because "when the sage's heart is calm, it becomes the mirror of Heaven and Earth, the mirror of the myriad things in nature" (The Way of Heaven). Zong Bing's "cleans[ing] the heart to taste the [myriad] images in Nature" would therefore exclude any pre-formulated subjective images when facing Nature. What Zong Bing really wants from the mountains and rivers is not his own subjective images, but what the mountains and rivers can reveal to him, that is, the Dao and beauty that are manifested in the forms of the mountains and rivers.

In spite of this great interest in Dao, Zong Bing does not, however, propose a metaphysical theory of art either, because he is not so much interested in Dao on the metaphysical level as in Dao on a more concrete level, that is, the *li* 理 and the beauty that the natural objects manifest. In the fifth paragraph of the Preface, Zong Bing writes:

> When the heart/mind fully comprehends what meets the eyes, principles/laws are formulated (*yingmu huixin weili* 應目會心為理). If we can skillfully represent/paint [*lei* 類, literally, paint in likeness] what we see, then the viewers' eyes will see exactly what we saw with our own eyes, their hearts/minds will, therefore, comprehend what we understood [when we looked at them]. As a result, they would also be able to discover the essence/spirit [*shen*] of the landscape and the principles/laws of Nature

through the painting. Even if one could go back to search in the real mountains and cliffs, it would not be any better [than looking at the paintings]. ("Preface to Landscape paintings" *hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序)

To Zong Bing, painting is useful not because it is morally uplifting. It is useful because it provides a better means to comprehend Nature's laws and appreciate Nature's beauty, even better than the real mountains and rivers in Nature. In order for a painting to serve such a function, however, the painter has to comprehend what meets the eyes and discover its essence and then formulate it into principles. However, the painter does not paint the essence or principles as abstract ideas. Zong Bing was fully aware of the fact that the spirit (*shen*), the beauty (*xiu* 秀) and the dynamics (*ling* 靈) of Nature are abstract qualities and that they are formless and therefore invisible and not graspable by themselves, because he immediately adds, after the above passage, that

> *shen*, by its nature, is formless. It dwells in the physical form and can be transposed to paintings. *Li* (that is, principles and laws) is submerged in shadows and visible forms. If one is truly skillful in painting, one can, therefore, exhaust [the spirit and nature of what's painted]. ("Preface to Landscape paintings" *hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序)

The whole idea is to represent, skillfully, the natural sceneries exactly as the painter sees them so that they will meet the viewers' eyes and be comprehended by their hearts. Zong Bing explains why he believes that such paintings are able to convey the real beauty and principles of nature in the following manner:

> Even principles [discovered by the great sages] that have been lost since Middle Ancient times can still be found through our minds thousands of years later; even the thoughts of the great sages that have become obscure can still be comprehended by reading the Classics. Let alone that which one has repeatedly visited in person, and observed closely with one's eyes. Moreover, [painting simply] represents forms with forms and represents colors with

> colors (*yixing xiexing, yise maose* 以形寫形，以色貌色). ("Preface to Landscape paintings" *hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序)

To put it into simple modern language, what Zong Bing is really saying here is this: If the principles and thoughts of the great sages can be transmitted through their words in the books, why cannot I paint the mountains and rivers so that I can continue to enjoy their beauty by looking at the paintings from my sick bed? After all, they are all places I have repeatedly visited in person and observed closely with my own eyes. Besides, in these paintings I am really just representing the mountains and rivers in their real forms and color them with their colors as found in nature.

The last statement in the above passage also clearly indicates that Zong Bing, like Gu Kaizhi before him and Xie He after him, believes that *shen* or *li* or the beauty of natural sceneries can only be represented through their its form. It is important to note, however, that when Zong Bing declares that landscape painting "represents forms with forms and represents colors with colors," he does not mean that the forms and colors themselves are the only important thing. Obviously, he is just as interested in the beauty, spirit and underlying principles of the landscapes as their forms and colors.

This well-balanced approach to the relationship between *xing* and *shen* in landscape painting as well as figure painting remained, with little challenge, the main stream of aesthetics for the next few dynasties. Zhang Yanyuan, one of the often quoted painting theorist from the Tang Dynasty, for example, expresses a similar view in his *Famous Paintings of All Dynasties* when he remarks:

> Well, the representation of things necessarily consists in physical resemblance (*xingsi)*. However, physical resemblance should be completed with its *guqi* 骨氣 (literally, bone energy). Physical resemblance and *guqi* are both rooted in the concept [that the painter forms] and ultimately depend on the painting

brush [to realize them in the painting] ("On the Six Aspects of Painting." *lun hua zhi liufa* 论畫之六法)

In the "On the Six Aspects of Painting" section, from which the above passage is quoted, Zhang Yanyuan is commenting on the "six aspects" of painting as proposed by Xie He. He uses the term *quqi* interchangeably with Xie He's term *qiyun*. Roger Goepper, in his book, *The Essence of Chinese Painting*, after quoting the above passage, concludes that "so truth to nature is not the real problem confronting the [ancient Chinese] painter but only one of the preconditions beyond which the true domain of art begins" (1063:12). Although to some extent this is true, it would be truer to say that truth to nature is the real goal of painting, which depends on the painter's conceptual power and brush techniques. In his discussion of the essence of Chinese painting, Geopper employs the terms "truth to nature," "formal resemblance" and "verisimilitude" interchangeably (1963:12). However, in the Chinese context, formal resemblance, as we have seen so far, is only part of truth to nature. Truth to nature does not mean a mere formal resemblance, but a formal resemblance completed with the *shen or qiyun* of the real objects or persons. So if we understand the true meaning of the term "truth to nature" in the Chinese context, we can perhaps agree that truth to nature is exactly the major domain of Chinese painting, be it landscape painting, or painting with human figures. This is testified to by other painters and theorists of the Tang period as well.

For example, Bai Juyi 白居易(772-846), one of the outstanding middle Tang Poets, claims that "[t]here are no fixed standards to judge if a painting is skillfully done; the only standard is resemblance. There is no fixed master to learn from; the only master is

what is real (畫無常工，以似為工；學無常師，以真為師)" (*hua ji* 畫記). Bai Juyi does not even differentiate between physical resemblance and resemblance in *shen*: his concept of *resemblance* obviously includes both. Bai Juyi also applied the same standard in his actual evaluation of paintings. In his "A Song on Painting Bamboo," for example, Bai Juyi writes:

> Among all the plants, bamboo is the most difficult to paint,
> Many painters since the ancient times have attempted, but no one achieved resemblance.
> Under the brush of brother Xiao, however, they approximate the real (*bizhen* 逼真).
> He is the first person [who could achieve resemblance] since the invention of colors.

Whether Xiao Yue 蕭悅 was the first painter who achieved a resemblance that makes the painting appear as if real is not our concern here. But it is clear that it is truth to nature, not the painter's thoughts, or feelings that makes Bai Juyi give him such a high praise.

After the Tang Dynasty, landscape painting became more and more popular, and writings on landscape painting started to flourish as well. However, truth to nature as a union of *xingsi* and *shensi* continued to be the major domain of Chinese painting, again, in both figure and landscape paintings. "A Record of Brush Techniques" (*bifa ji* 筆法記) written by a Five Dynasties (907-960) painter, Jing Hao's 荊浩, is perhaps the most representative discussion on the subject after Tang and before the time when Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 (1037-1101) allegedly dismissed *xingsi* from both painting and poetry. We will save Su Dongpo's theory on painting for later; for now, let us have a look at what Jing Hao thinks landscape painting, and painting in general, is.

Jing Hao's view is expressed through a fictional conversation between himself as a young man and an old man whom he claims to have met one day on Shenzheng Mountain where he used to live. He tells us in the beginning of the *Record*, that when he was young, he used to feel very good about his understanding and skills at painting. But one spring, he met this old man, who asked him if he knew what painting and the techniques of the painting brushes were. Jing Hao, the young man, answers:

> Painting means appearances (*hua* 華, literally: flowers). It treasures resemblance to the real (貴似得真). Am I on the right track?
>
> The old man said: "Not really. Painting means to draw. It studies the appearances of physical objects in order to discover their true nature (度物象而取其真). If the object's nature lies in its flowers, then we choose [to represent it in] its flowers. If its nature lies in its fruits, then we choose [to represent it in] its fruits. We should not mistake flowers for fruits. Otherwise, we might be able to achieve [physical] resemblance; but we will never be able to achieve a representation of what is real (*tuzhen* 圖真).
>
> "What is resemblance and what is real then?"
>
> "Resemblance means [the painting] only presents its physical form but fails to reveal its *qi*. Real means both the form and *qi* are vivid to the fullest degree." ("A Record of Brush Techniques" *bifa ji* 筆法記)

It is true that the idea on the nature of painting expressed here, as by most major painters before Jing Hao, stresses the importance of *shen* over that of *xing*, because it is the *shen* of the object in painting that makes the paintings appear as if real. However, the idea of physical resemblance as part of truth to nature still remains without doubt. The real difference between the two views on painting expressed here is not whether painting should be true to nature, but what counts as truth to nature. While Jing Hao the young man believes that painting is all about appearances, which reminds us of Plato's metaphor of the mirror, the old man, or Jing Hao the writer, believes that painting can and should do better. It has to be true to nature in both physical form and essence.

Another difference between the young painter's view of painting and that of the old man is that the old man's view clearly stresses the painter's active intellectual, cognitive participation in the creative process. Interestingly, however, Wu Lifu, as we have mentioned earlier, believes that the idea of painting as "representation of what is real (*tuzhen* 圖真)," suggests that Jing Hao has an idea of painting as "passive representation under the slavery of Nature" (1983:26). As far as I can judge from Jing Hao's original text, there is no evidence to indicate anything slavish in Jing Hao's idea of painting. First of all, in the above quoted passage the old man clearly states that the painter has to *study* (*du* 度, literally: measure) the appearances in order to understand that which lies beneath the appearance, that is, the *shen* or *qi* of the object; and "representation of what is real" means not just the appearance but also the *qi* of the object. Secondly, in the same essay, Jing Hao proposed "six essential elements" of painting, the third of which is "thinking (*si* 思)." The old man explains the element of "thinking" as "cutting and poking [the details to find] what is essential; thinking with concentration to form [the image] of the object (刪掇大要、凝想形物)." In other words, the painter has to study the object, make selections and use the imaginative and conceptual power of his/her mind to formulate an image of the objects that are to be represented. We will come back for a more detailed look at the Chinese view on the role of the painter's mind/heart in the artistic creative process. For now I think we can safely say that Wu Lifu's comments on Jing Hao's idea on the nature of painting is based upon either a misunderstanding or intentional misinterpretation of Jing Hao's original text. Jing Hao is actually against any passive mirror-like representation. Jing

Hao, like many painters before him, had a very well-balanced view between representation of physical appearances and representation of what lies beneath the surface: the nature of painting lies in its ability to represent the true nature through the appearances.

This idea of painting's truth to nature as a union of physical resemblance and resemblance in essence persists without doubt among later painters until Su Dongpo (1037 –1101) wrote the little poem that starts with the well-known line: "If anyone evaluates painting with [the sole criteria of] physical resemblance, his/her judgment is still in the neighborhood of that of the children." Since the poem is often misunderstood and mistranslated, I have chosen to present it here first in its original form with a word for word English translation.

論	畫	以	形	似	
Discuss	painting	with	formal	resemblance	
見	與	兒童	鄰		
Views	with	children	neighboring		
作	詩	必	此	詩	
Compose	a poem	must only be	this	poem	
定	知	非	詩人		
Surely	know	not	a poet		
詩	畫	本	一	律	
Poetry	painting	essentially	one	principle	
天	工	與	清	新	
Heavenly	skill	and	limpid/clean	fresh/new	

The six lines may be freely translated into English as:

If anyone evaluates paintings with [the sole criteria of] physical resemblance,

His/her judgment is [still] in the neighborhood of that of the children.
If someone cannot compose a poem that transcends [the specified theme of] the poem,
We know for sure that this is not a [true] poet.
Poetry and painting in essence share the sample principle –
The skills of Nature and freshness.

When discussing Su Dongpo's own theory on painting, we should be attentive to three misguided tendencies among modern scholars. First, some western scholars tend to understand Su Dongpo's claim that it is childish to judge paintings with mere physical resemblance indicates that he does not think painting needs to represent likeness to what is real. This interpretation is usually found in the various English translations of the above poem. For example, Roger Goepper seems to have taken Su Dongpo's term *xingsi* to be resemblance in general and therefore translated the first two line of the poem as:

Anyone who talks about painting in terms of likeness
Deserves to be classed with the children (Geopper, 1965:12).

And Victor Mair translated the poem as:

Who says a painting must look like life?
He sees only with children's eyes.
Who says a poem must stick to the theme?
Poetry is certainly lost on him.
Poetry and painting share a single goal –
Clean freshness and effortless skill (*The World of Literature*, 1044).

So in these English translations, it appears as if Su Dongpo did not care about truth to life or truth to nature at all. The truth is, however, that Su Dongpo cared about nothing but truth to life in both painting and poetry. But before I present any evidence to support this claim of mine, let me point out the other two tendencies among modern

scholars in dealing with Su Dongpo's theory on painting and poetry: Secondly, as Zhang Zhilie 张志烈 points out, "for a long time, when scholars talked about Dongpo's view on art, they especially emphasized that Dongpo neglects *xingsi*. Some scholars even classify Dongpo as an 'imagist' and declare that in Dongpo's views of art, there is no place for *xingsi*" (1986:126). Thirdly, certain other modern Chinese scholars believe that this little poem indicates that Su Dongpo proposes the aesthetic principle that the artists express their own heart (Wu Lifu, 1983:7). We will discuss the third theory a little later. Let us first examine if it is true that Su Dongpo did not care about truth to life in artistic work and whether he emphasizes *shensi* to the degree that excludes the importance of *xingsi*.

Su Dongpo wrote a large number of short essays and poems on painting; and in most of them, there is an unmistakable emphasis on truth to life/nature. Let us first have a brief look at two of such short essays:

> In the province of Sichuan, there is a scholar named Du. He has this great hobby of collecting works of calligraphy and painting. He has at least several hundred scrolls in his collection. Among them, there is a scroll of bulls by Dai Song (戴嵩). He loves it so much that he prepared it with a jade scroll and placed it in a silk bag. Wherever he goes, he takes it with him. One day, he was airing the painting in the sunlight. A cowherd boy happened to pass by and when he saw the painting, the boy couldn't help but breaking into laughter and said: "This is a painting of bulls fighting. When a bull is actually fighting, all its strength is concentrated on the horns and its tail tucked in between the hind legs. But in the painting, the bulls are fighting with their tails sticking out. This is ridiculous." The scholar smiled and had to agree with the boy. There has been a saying since the ancient times: "one should ask the [male] slaves about matters concerning tilling the land and the maids about matters concerning weaving." This is indeed an unchanging rule. ("An Essay on Dai Song's Painting of Bulls" *shu Dai Song hua niu* 書戴松畫牛)

This essay, although written earlier than the poem in question, is a very good illustration of what Su Dongpo means by the observation: "[i]f anyone evaluates paintings with [the sole criteria of] physical resemblance, his view is [still] in the neighborhood of that of the children." The scholar, Du, is a learned man with broad experience in paintings; but his judgment on Dai Song's painting in his collection is not even as sound as that of a boy. The scholar treasures the painting so much because, first, perhaps, it is painted by such a famous painter, and second, he cannot see anything wrong with the bull in painting. His inability in seeing the problem of the painting results from his lack of knowledge on what a fighting bull really looks like in real life. He can only judge by the physical shape of a bull – as long as it has got two horns, a tail and looks like a bull in appearance, then, it must be a good painting. The cowherd boy, however, lives with the bulls every day of his life. He knows not only what a bull normally looks like, but also how a bull behaves and looks like in specific circumstances and why it behaves that way. Therefore, he is able to see through the appearances and tell whether a painting succeeds in representing the true nature of a bull fighting. Such would be the judgment of an expert, and the scholar's evaluation of the painting, in comparison, seems superficial and childish. The same idea is also clearly seen in another short essay:

> Huang Quan 黃荃 once painted a flying bird with both the neck and legs stretched out. A spectator said to him: [during flying] when the bird stretches its neck, it draws in the legs; when it stretches its legs, its neck draws in. It cannot stretch both the neck and legs at the same time [during flying]." [Huang Quan] verified it [by watching a real bird flying] and found it indeed true. From this we know that if one is not careful in observation, one cannot even be a good painter, let alone something of greater significance. Therefore, a gentleman should be diligent in learning and always ready to question. ("An

Essay on Huang Quan's Painting of Flying Birds" *shu Huan Quan hua que* 書黃荃畫雀)

In this and the previously quoted essay, Su Dongpo expresses, coincidentally, similar ideas as Plato (*Ion*, *Republic* X) on the artist's knowledge of special things and this knowledge's importance to the artist's ability in representing what is true. Both Plato and Su Dongpo propose that the person who has the best knowledge of a specific thing is one that deals with it everyday as a profession. For example, a blacksmith knows better what a bit looks like (*Ion*) and a general has better knowledge about warfare than Homer (*Ion*, *Repubic* X). Or as Su Dongpo puts it, "one should ask the [male] salves about matters concerning tilling the land." Both Plato and Su Dongpo believed that knowledge of the thing being represented is essential and determines whether the resulting artwork's ability to represent truth. However, Plato and Su Dongpo (and most Chinese poets, for this matter) differ in a very significant point: While Plato believes that the artist cannot acquires as good a knowledge on a specific as one in that profession, and therefore, artistic work as imitation will rarely approximate the real, Su Dongpo advises that the artist can and should attempt to achieve the same level of knowledge as one who knows the thing professionally so that he can represent the true nature of the thing. Failure of achieving such a knowledge is often seen as the major causes of inferior art. In the above quoted passage, for example, the famous painter, Huang Quan, failed to represent the true nature of the flying bird because, in Su Dongpo's own words, he was not careful in his observation of the bird in real life. The painter only knows what a bird normally looks like but does not know how a bird really looks like when flying. It is easy to paint the form of a bird; it is representing the nature

of the bird in a specific situation that is most difficult. Therefore, if one stops at mere physical resemblance, be it when painting or viewing a painting, one still needs improve one's knowledge and perception. The way to improve one's knowledge is not by looking at more paintings, but to be more careful in one's observation of life and nature.

However, the emphasis on the importance of representing the true nature of the object does not mean that form is not important. From both of the above essays, we can see that the nature or essence of the object, a fighting bull, flying bird, or anything else, can only be represented through its physical form. As a matter of fact, the only way to judge if the painting succeeds in capturing the nature of the object is through the way the physical form is represented. The cowherd boy, for example, can only tell that the fighting bull is ridiculously drawn by the way the bull's tail looks like. And in the same token, the spectator can tell that the famous painter Huang Quan has produced a bad painting by the way the bird's neck and legs were arranged. So we can safely conclude that Su Dongpo himself neither disregarded the importance of physical resemblance nor believed that painting does not have to look like life. When he declares that "[i]f anyone evaluates paintings with [the sole criteria of] physical resemblance, [h]is/her judgment is [still] in the neighborhood of that of the children," he simply means that one should not use physical resemblance as the only criteron to judge the value of a painting.

The nature of painting to Su Dongpo, as to so many scholars before him, is still truth to nature. As we recall, in the Chinese context, truth to nature does not really mean what Geopper and Mair seem to have taken it to mean, that is, mere physical

resemblance. It is, rather, a union of physical resemblance and resemblance in spirit or essence, with a clear emphasis on the latter. This has not really changed in Su Dongpo's theories; only Su Dongpo has made it even clearer by another pair of terms: *changxing* 常形 (literally: normal/constant form) and *changli* 常理 (literally: usual/constant inner principle). Here is how Su Dongpo explains these two terms and their respective importance in art:

> As I mentioned once when discussing painting, human beings, animals, buildings, as well as various utensils and objects all have their constant form. As to things such as mountains, trees like bamboo, waters, fog, clouds, etc., they may not have a constant form, but they have their constant inner principles. When the constant forms are misrepresented [in a painting], everybody knows it. When a painting misses the constant inner principles, however, even those who have a solid knowledge of painting may not even be able to realize it. Therefore, all those who intend to achieve any fame in painting must necessarily rely on [their paintings of] things that do not have a constant form [, because they are hard to paint and test beast the true ability of a painter]. However, when the constant form is misrepresented, the flaw may not affect the value of the whole painting; but when the constant inner principle is missed even by a little, the whole painting is wasted. Because they do not have a constant form, one cannot afford to be careless about their constant inner principles. A normal painter in the world may be able to perfectly represent a constant form, but it takes a real expert to tell the inner principles. ("A Record on Painting in the Jing Yin Temple" *jingyinyuan hua ji* 淨因院畫記)

While painters during the previous dynasties had used other terms, such as *qi*, *guqi*, and *qiyun*, as a close synonym of the term *shen*, Su Dongpo directly calls it *li*, that is, inner principles. As we have seen earlier, Zong Bing also used the term *li* interchangeably with *shen*. But his term *li* is sometimes mystifying because he occasionally also talks about Dao in the same breath with *shen*. Su Dongpo's constant inner principle, on the other hand, is very explicit. There is nothing metaphysical about it. What do constant

form and constant inner principle exactly mean then? Using the bull from the previous quotations as an example, the bull's constant form would be what a bull physically looks like in normal situations. In other words, the physical characteristics of a bull that differentiate a bull's form from, say, that of a sheep, or a duck, or even a cow. However, in any specific situation, the bull will have other added physical features while retaining its basic physical characteristic, or constant form. For example, when fighting, its eyes glare, its neck becomes stiff and its tail is tucked in between the hind legs, etc. The constant inner principles of a fighting bull would be what stance the bull has when fighting and the reasons why the bull assumes such a stance, instead of any other. A painting of a bull first has to make sure that the basic physical characteristics get across in the painting. According to Su Dongpo and most other Chinese painters, this is the easiest part of painting and does not test the true ability of a painter. That is why it is childish to stop at this level. Truly great painters should be able to discover and represent the form and nature of a thing in a specific situation, in addition to its constant physical characteristics. It is worth noting, however, that Su Dongpo did not say that representation of the constant form is not important, nor did he think that it was not a problem to miss the constant form in painting. He obviously regards it a flaw, only that a flaw in the representation of the constant form usually does not cause as much damage to the value of the painting as a failure to represent the constant inner principle, or nature of it. So when we now look back at Su Dongpo's claim that it is childish to judge a painting with the criteria of physical resemblance, we can perhaps agree with the Jin Dynasty scholar, Wang Ruoxu 王若虛 (1174-1243), when he concludes that:

> What painting treasures is the physical form. If we cannot paint with resemblance, we might as well forget about painting it in the first place. If we cannot stick to the given theme when composing a poem, how can it be a good poem? However, is Su Dongpo's view wrong, then? My answer is: [Dongpo's real idea is that] the best painting should go beyond mere physical resemblance, yet not distorting its physical form. [When composing a poem], it should not be confined by the theme, yet it should not miss the theme. (*Hunan's Remarks on Poetry hunan shihua* 湖南詩話)[12]

Let us now address the third tendency in interpreting Su Dongpo's painting and literary theory. The tendency is represented, again, by Wu Lifu when he claims that "Su Dongpo proposes a [new] aesthetic principle with the famous line, '[i]f anyone evaluates paintings with [the sole criteria] of physical resemblance, his view is [still] in the neighborhood with that of the children,' and requires that painters express their own heart" (1983:7).

Historically, this poem may indeed have helped with the development of a painting theory, which ignores physical resemblance almost completely. Some later painters, especially since the Yuan dynasty, took Su Dongpo's line literally and started to pursue *shensi* in their painting without regard to physical resemblance at all. As a result, as Jiang Kongyang (1991:132) rightly points out, Chinese painting, since the Yuan dynasty (1206-1368), took a new direction in which the content of painting became more and more subjective and expressive, on the one hand, and the form of painting became more and more minimalist, on the other. The most representative discussion by a traditional Chinese painter of such theories in painting is, perhaps, that by Ni Zan 倪瓚(1301-1374), also known as Ni Yunlin 倪雲林, who declares, in his "On Painting" (*hualun* 畫論), that:

> What I call painting is nothing but a few brush stokes carelessly drawn. It does not care about physical resemblance; instead, it is simply meant to be a form of self-entertainment. ("On Painting" *lunhua* 論畫)

And

> In my bamboo paintings, I am simply setting forth the untrammeled feelings in my breast. Why should I care whether the painting shows any resemblance [to real bamboos] or not, or whether their leaves should be densely clustered or sparsely spread out, or whether their stems should be slanting or straight? Sometimes after I have been spattering around for a while, spectators may take it for hemp or reed. There is no way for me to show that what I paint is really bamboos either. I really don't know what to do with these spectators. ("On Painting" *lunhua* 論畫)

There is a definite disregard for resemblance, either physical or essential. Ni Zan's idea of painting is, indeed, unmistakably self-expressive. Surely Su Dongpo, as modern scholars generally believe, has had his share of influence upon this expressive idea of painting. Tracing Su Dongpo's influence upon later painters is beyond the scope of this paper; however based on the evidence from Su Dongpo's own texts which we have seen so far, we can confidently conclude that whatever influence Su Dongpo has had on the expressive idea of Chinese painting, it was most likely done unintentionally on his part and caused by a misunderstanding of his ideas on the part of later expressive painters.

Most modern Chinese scholars (Wu Lifu, 1983:7; Qi Zhixiang, 1993:225) who read an expressive theory into ancient Chinese discussions on painting and poetry, base their argument on the fact that the ancient Chinese painters and poets emphasize the importance of the artist's *xin* (heart/mind) and *yi* 意 (concept, or conceptualization, or idea formed by the heart/mind). They believe that because of the emphasis on the role

of the painter and poet's *yi* or *xin* in the creative process, the *shen* as in *shensi* (that is, resemblance in spirit) or *chuanshen* (that is, capturing the *shen*) gradually shifted from the nature of the object painted or described to the subjective ideas, feelings of the artist. Such a shift may be found in the works of some later painters, but with Su Dongpo and artists before him it is hardly the case.

It is true that the Chinese artists have emphasized the importance of the artist's *xin* to a greater extent than the mind was emphasized in ancient Greek. But it really concerns the means, instead of the contents, of art. The Chinese model for a perfect artistic creation can be formulated as

Objects in Nature → the eyes → the heart → the hands → images on paper

The role of the heart is to grasp the essence, spirit (*shen*) and the inner principles (*li*) of the objects in Nature and to form a vivid image of the real thing before the hand actually starts to work. This model started to develop since the Jin period. Zong Bing, as we have seen, for example, has claimed that the painter "responds [to the things in nature] with the eyes [and] comprehends them with the heart in order to get to their inner principles (*yingmu huixin chenli* 應目會心成理)" ("A Preface to Landscape Paintings" *hua shanshui xu* 畫山水序). The starting point of artistic creation is Nature. The artist treats Nature as the master and learns from it; or as Yao Zui 姚最 (537?-603?) puts it: "the heart learns from Nature (*xinshi zuaohua* 心師造化)" (*A Sequel to Classes of Painters xu huapin* 續畫品). However, the artist does not merely copy what meets the eyes. Some ancient Chinese painters advised, following Zhuang Zi, that the painter uses his/her heart as a mirror. But the mirror is not understood as a tool capable only of

reflecting the appearances, as the mirror of Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. As we have seen from the second chapter of this paper, the metaphor of the heart as a mirror in the Chinese context is used in the sense that the heart should be kept clear of any self-awareness so that it can reflect the nature of things without distortion. Consequently, the goal of the heart's learning from Nature is not to invoke some personal thoughts or feelings, but, to borrow a phrase from Yao Zui again, to "exhaust the nature as well as the appearances [of things] through learning (*xue qiong xingbiao* 學窮性表)" (*A Sequel to Classes of Painters*). The ultimate goal of painting, as we have seen, is to represent things such that they appear full of life and natural as if created by Nature itself. In order to achieve such naturalness and liveliness in art, the artist is advised to identify completely with the objects to be painted; in order to achieve such a complete identification with the objects, the artist, in turn, has to learn from the objects through observation. Records and anecdotes on this subject abound in ancient texts. A Song Dynasty (960-1279) painter, Luo Dajing 羅大經 has put quite a few of them together in order to make the point clearer:

> If a painter of snow cannot paint its cleanness; if a painter of the moon cannot paint its brightness; if a painter of flowers cannot paint their fragrance; if a painter of spring water cannot paint its murmuring sound; or if a painter of a person cannot paint the person's emotions, such a painter does not know the *Dao* of painting. Once when the Emperor of Tang invited Han Gan to view his collections of paintings of horses, Han Gan observed: "The horses in the stables are all our teachers." When Li Bo (李伯) once visited the Grand Officer of the royal stable, he spent all his days in the stable observing the horses so that he didn't have any time to talk to the other guests. His grasp of the horses' spirit grew and his understanding of the horses' nature increased as he observed them. After a long time of observation, he became able to formulate whole horses in his mind. Since then, his painting brush moves freely and the paintings look natural and skillful. [This is testified by] Huang

> Tingjian's poem: "When Lord Li painted horses, he painted their bones as well as fleshes. Horses grow out of his brush as easily as bamboo stems break [under fire]." The word "grow" is very appropriate. Because Lord Li has whole horses already in his mind, the horses naturally grow under the brush. It is not like imitating in front of a real horse. [Another great painter of our own time,] Zeng Yunchao 曾雲巢, is especially skillful in painting grasshoppers (草蟲). The older he gets, the better his grasshopper paintings become. I once asked him if there was any secret that he could enlighten me upon. He said: "What secret can there be? When I was very young, I often went to catch grasshoppers, put them in a meshed cover and observe them. I did this day after day and night after night. I never got tired of it. Even after that, I still feared that I might have failed to understand the grasshopper's *shen*. So I continued observing the grasshoppers in real grasslands. Only then did I comprehend the nature (*tian*) of grasshoppers. After that, when I wave my brush [to paint grasshoppers], I cannot tell if I am a grasshopper or the grasshopper has become myself. This seems to be no different from the way Nature creates the myriad things. How can there be a secret that I can teach others?" ("Remarks on Painting" *huashuo* 畫說)

The last of these anecdotes clearly remind us of Zhuang Zi's dream of the butterflies; but there is nothing mysterious or metaphysical about Luo Daojing or Zeng Yunchao's idea as expressed in this anecdote: the central idea is that the painter should closely observe Nature, comprehend the true nature of the object so thoroughly that when actually painting, he can completely forget himself and identify with the object being drawn.

Su Dongpo also stresses the importance of the artist's *xin* for the same reason as Luo Dajing: the *xin* is the only means with which the artist can grasp the true nature or inner principle of the objective world. He observes in one of his letters to his friends that "the searching for true nature is just as [difficult as] tying down the winds with a rope or capturing the shadow with a net. We cannot even find one person among ten thousand who can completely understand a certain thing's nature by the heart, let alone

a person who can express it clearly with the hands or mouth"("In Reply to Xie Minshi's Letter" *da Xie Minshi shu* 答谢民师書). Therefore, in his essays, he often urges that one should diligently observe the changes of the myriad things in nature to completely grasp their natural principles (*ziran zhi li* 自然之理), and cherish them in the heart ("A Letter to Prime Minister Zeng" *shang zeng chengxiang shu* 上曾丞相書).

Another reason that some ancient painters emphasized the importance of the *xin* is because painting requires the painter to exert his/her intellectual and cognitive power to make selections among the details of raw materials. In Western art and poetic theories such as that of Aristotle, it is well known that the difference between historical record and poetry lies in the fact that while history represents facts and events as they really happened, poetry is a selection, interpretation, and understanding of what happened or may happen as seen through the eyes of the poet. The ancient Chinese made the same point about painting by differentiating between a map and a painting. As we have mentioned earlier, Jing Hao from the Five Dynasties listed "thinking" as the third of the "six essential elements" of painting. He explains "thinking" as "cutting and poking [the details to find] what is essential; thinking with concentration to form [the image of] the object (刪撦大要、凝想形物)"("A Record of Brush Techniques"). In other words, the artist has to select those details, which best represent the most important characteristics. Painting does not represent every detail of an object exactly as it is found in nature. This same idea has been proposed quite a few centuries before Jing Hao, by Wang Wei 王微(?-453) of the Jin period, who wrote in his "On Painting" like this:

> When people talk about painting, they generally concentrate on the shapes and forms. However, when the ancients created painting, their intention was not [to

> use them as maps] to plan cities, or to draw the borders of states, or to mark mountains and highlands or to map rivers and lakes. Essential to any form is its underlying *shen* [spirit], which is what makes it alive and have effect upon the human mind. When the *shen* of an object is still and not represented [as in a map], its form will not come to life. ("On Painting." *xuhua* 叙畫)

The difference between a map and a painting lies in that while the former has to be exact and relies completely on measurements, the latter involves the active involvement of the painter's heart and imagination. It is not enough to simply observe and paint, because "there is a limit to what the eyes can see" (Wang Wei, *xuehua* 叙畫). To see something in its completeness and true form, one has to use one's intelligence or *shen*. Therefore, Wang Wei concludes that painting "is not simply a matter of the hands. It depends on the spirit and intelligence of the painter as well" (Wang Wei, *xuehua* 叙畫). Although Wang Wei's chief purpose in the essay is to boost the image of painting and try to raise its importance to that of writing, the point he makes on the difference between a map and a painting is very enlightening.

Guo Xi (1020?-1075), in his treatise "The Sublime Beauty of Forests and Spring Water Flows" (*Lin Quan Gaozhi* 林泉高致), makes the same point as Jing Hao and Wang Wei:

> What do I mean by 'selection not refined?' Well, mountains usually range hundreds of miles. It is not possible that every spot is outstandingly attractive. Rivers usually run thousands of miles, how can every portion of it be just as beautiful? Mountain Tai Hang stretches all over central China, but only the Lin Lu Peak is presentable to the eyes. Mountain Tai spans across the two provinces of Qi and Lu, but only the beauty of Long Yan (Dragon Cliff) is incomparable. If we paint these mountains in their entirety, how will the result be any different from a map! Such mistakes arise from lack of ability in making selections. ("The Sublime Beauty of Forests and Spring Water Flows " *Lin Quan Gaozhi* 林泉高致)

Guo Xi criticizes his fellow painters for suffering from four weaknesses: Lack of self-cultivation, lack of observation, lack of experience/travel, and inability in making proper selections. He believes that a painter should cultivate him/herself to better understand and appreciate the real beauty of mountains and waters. A painter should travel widely and closely observe the great mountains and rivers to be painted, otherwise a painter's scope is confined to his local area. The ultimate goal of rich experience, self-cultivation and close observation is to cultivate one's ability in seeing where the real beauty of nature lies and to make the best selection when painting the mountains and rivers. Selection is important because landscape painting is to represent the beauty, principles and life-spirit of nature, instead of recording every detail of a landscape.

Not only are landscape painters to make selections among factual details, but also painters of human figures are given the leeway not to represent a person's physical appearances exactly as they are, if that is called for by the need to bring out the character or personality of the person in the painting. Gu Kaizhi has always been praised for his act of adding three hairs on the cheeks of Fei Kai's image in order to vividly represent the personality of Fei Kai in the painting. Su Dongpo's famous short essay "On Capturing the *shen*" (*chuanshen lun* 傳神論) continues the spirit of this tradition:

> [In a figure painting], if the eyes and [the shape of the] cheeks look like the real person, it is not likely that any other part will not resemble the original, because all other parts, such as the nose, eye-brows can be altered accordingly without harming the degree of resemblance. The essence of figure painting lies in capturing the person's *tian* 天 [that is, nature]. To achieve this, [the painter]

> should secretly observe the person in action among other people. However, most painters would ask the person to dress up, sit still and looking at a fixed point without any movement. In such situations, how could one capture the person's nature? The place which most reveals the outstanding characteristics (意思所在, literally: the place where the thoughts and ideas dwell) of a person varies. For some, it is the eyes and eye-brows. For others, it may even be the nose or mouth. [When painting the image of Fei Kai (斐楷),] Gu Kaizhi added three hairs on the cheeks and Fei's spirit suddenly became fully represented in the painting. This indicates that the most outstanding characteristic of Fei is his bearded cheeks. ("On Capturing the *shen*" *chuanshen lun* 傳神論)

There is no abstract theory or reasoning here. As usual, Su Dongpo simply speaks according to his actual experience as a painter as well as that of many great painters before him. First, it is important to note that Su Dongpo emphasizes on the importance of observing a person in actions in order to fully understand the person's nature. We are very familiar with Aristotle's claim that tragedy is the imitation of an action, and that thought and character are the two natural causes from which actions spring (*Poetics,* VI). Although the Chinese did not, even in fictional imitations during the later dynasties, emphasize the importance of action over that of character and thought, they were fully aware that in order to catch the character and thought or life spirit of anything, be it a person or a grasshopper, one has to observe it in action, because they were aware that every action is driven by a certain thought and every action reveals the true character and nature of the person or thing. This may explain why the so-called Chinese "figure paintings" would normally not only represent the person in full figure, but also often among other people or in a certain situation and assuming a certain stance. In other words, they are representations of persons in action, instead of sitting still. Secondly, to Su Dongpo, the chief goal of figure painting, as painting of landscape, or natural objects, is to represent with a clear resemblance to the original. But this

resemblance is not merely on the level of appearances. Resemblance should be understood exactly as Golden and Hardison's term "fine likeness" as they explain in the following passage:

> If, for example, we say, "That photograph is a *fine likeness* [italics added] of John; it catches his character beautifully; and he should use it for the application form," we are echoing the *Poetics*. What we are saying is (a) that the photograph communicates the fact that John possesses certain general traits (warmth, strength, sense of humor, and so on); and (b) that it will reveal these traits to *someone who has never seen John* ... Obviously, a painting communicates a great deal more than a photograph. We have never seen the "originals" of Rembrandt's portraits, but we know the kind of men they were, better, perhaps, than we know all but our closest friends. (Golden & Hardison, 1981:93)

The Chinese term *shensi* as used by Su Dongpo and many other Chinese painters is an equivalent of the *fine likeness* as employed by Golden and Hardison here. To Su Dongpo, just as to Aristotle, the artistic value of a painting and a literary mimesis lies exactly in this ability of representing the general traits and true nature of a person, a natural scene, a time and human life in general through selecting and arranging the particulars into a unified artwork. To achieve this goal, the artist must necessarily engage his/her own mental power, that is, the mind for Aristotle and *xin*/yi for the ancient Chinese.

Up to this point, I hope I have presented enough evidence to show that the debate between *xingsi* and *shensi* is not one between art as mimesis and art as expression or anything else. Rather, it is more of a debate on whether art should represent appearances, as Socrates's mirror or the mapmaker's rulers, or art should represent nature on a deeper or higher level. *Shensi* is to represent in such a way that the images in the painting appear so full of life and vivid that they seem to be no different from

"the real thing." As Harold Osborne has pointed out, in his *Aesthetics and Art Theory*, in the Western mimetic tradition, "great prominence is given to the artist's skill in making it appear not to be what it is but rather the reality of what it represents" (1968:33). Osborne calls this "illusionistic verisimilitude" (1968:32). Such an attitude to art has often been illustrated by numerous interesting anecdotes of how things in the paintings appear to the viewer to be real. For example, the Greek painter, Appelles, was said to have once painted a horse so realistically that live horses were deceived and neighed. Another interesting story is that "Zeuxis once painted a boy carrying grapes so realistically that the birds flew down and pecked the grapes. Thereupon Zeuxis confessed failure, because if he had painted the boy as realistically as the grapes, the birds would have been afraid to approach" (Osborne, 1965:33)[13]. In the Chinese context, *shensi* has also been explained in similar terms. According to *Bo Wu Zhi* 博物志 (*A Comprehensive Record of Things*), the famous Han painter Liu Bao 劉褒 was so skillful at painting that his painting of summer clouds made viewers feel hot and his painting of northern winds made viewers feel chilly. Su Dongpo gives great prominence to Pu Yongsheng's 蒲永升 paintings of waters because those paintings Pu created for him make him feel cool during hot summer days (*hua shui ji* 畫水記). Yang Weizhen 楊維楨 of the Yuan Dynasty explains *shensi* in painting in a similar fashion:

> Therefore, of the merits of paintings, there are capturing the *xing* and capturing the *shen*. Capturing the *shen* means that the *qiyun* [of the things in the painting should be] alive and moving. For instance, a painting of cats, when hung up on the wall, should frighten away any mouse. … The painting of a true sage, when prayed to, should respond [to the prayer]. The image of a person realistically drawn should reveal his/her spirit. Is this not what "*qiyun* is alive

and moving" mean? Is this not close to the creation of Nature? ("On Painting" *hua lun* 論畫)

Such anecdotes and observations surely sound very close to those Osborne cites from the Western tradition of "illusionistic verisimilitude." The clear victory of *shensi*, therefore, does not indicate a non-mimetic idea of art. On the contrary, it reveals that the ancient Chinese idea about the nature of art is remarkably similar to that of the Western classical period.

III. The Problem of *Xingsi* and *Shensi* in Poetry

In the Western classical tradition, poetry and painting were often discussed in the same breath, because they were believed to share the same principles – they were both mimetic in nature. Plato, for example, based his accusation of poetry largely on his analysis of painting. Aristotle also believes that painting and poetry are the same as far as their nature is concerned: they both imitate; they only differ in their means: while painting imitates with color and shapes, poetry does so with words and rhythms. Simonides was even more straightforward and simply claimed that "[p]oetry is vocal painting and painting is silent poetry."[14] Such a view on the relationship between poetry and painting was also clear in the Chinese tradition. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, scholars such as Lu Ji, Zhang Yanyuan, and Han Chunquan had all believed that painting and poetry have the same origin and can serve the same function. This was later repeated many times, so that the saying that "poetry and painting share the same origin" (*shi hua tongyuan* 詩畫同源) has long become a Chinese cliché. Su Dongpo, as we have seen from the short poem we quoted earlier, also believed that

poetry and painting share the same principles. In other places, he has repeatedly expressed the same idea. For example, when he comments on the poems and paintings of the Tang poet, Wang Wei, he observes that there is poetry in his paintings and painting in his poems (詩中有畫、畫中有詩) ("On Wang Wei's Painting of the Clouds and Rains over Nan Tian"); in another poem, "A poem on the Stone Screen, composed upon Ou-yang's demand 歐陽少師令賦所蓄石屏", he ends his poem by saying: "Great painters since ancient times were no vulgar people; they imitate (*moxie* 摹寫) objective images (*wuxiang* 物象) in a similar fashion as the poets." Similar remarks as that of Simonides on painting and poetry abound in the Chinese texts. Before Su Dongpo, there has already been the saying that, as Guo Xi also testifies, "poetry is shapeless painting, and painting is poetry with shapes 詩是無形畫、畫是有形詩" (*huayi -Linquan gaozhi* 畫疑--林泉高致). Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), Su Dongpo's most outstanding contemporary, once wrote that "Lord Li [Li Boshi] has [poetic] lines but is unwilling to spew them forth from his mouth/He paints them into silent poems with light ink, instead" (*ciyun zizan ziyou ti qiji tu* 次韻子瞻子由題憩寂圖). The idea of painting as silent poetry became very popular during later dynasties. Jiang Shaoshu 姜紹書 of the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644), for example, even named his book of painting history *A History of Silent Poetry* (無聲詩史).

Therefore, the Chinese ideas on painting which we discussed earlier, especially those of the later scholars such as Su Dongpo, also readily apply to literature. As a matter of fact, it is a common practice, among modern scholars, to discuss the relationship between, and base their conclusions about the *shensi* and *xingsi* theories in

literature on evidence quoted from texts, such as those we saw earlier, which were originally about painting. Consequently, we can, perhaps, already conclude, even without providing any further evidence, that the debate between *xingsi* and *shensi* in literature clearly reveals a strong mimetic tendency in the Chinese literary tradition as well. However, to make this conclusion more convincing, let us have a look at a few ancient Chinese discussions on *xingsi* and *shensi* as directly related to literary writing.

The emphasis on *xingsi* in literary writings first came with the flourishing of the poetic genre of *fu* 賦, that is, descriptive poetry. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the *Book of Songs*, *fu* is merely one of the "six arts," albeit the most often used. During the Han periods, *fu* developed into a separate and independent genre of its own and from that point on became a highly popular literary form for quite a few centuries until the Tang dynasty. *Fu* by nature is descriptive and therefore good at representing objects and natural scenes. As a result, although *shensi* had clearly become the catch phrase in painting since as early as the fourth century, *xingsi* remained, as Chen Chuanxi points out (1991:42), a positive requirement of literary writing and the category of *shensi* was not introduced into literary theory before the Tang dynasty. During those centuries between Han and Tang, when poets and scholars discussed poetry, they invariably remarked upon the representational nature of poetry and the importance of *xingsi*.

In the literary practice and theory of Zuo Si 左思 (250? – 305?), for example, truth to reality was taken almost literally. In the preface to his masterpiece, "A Fu of Three Capitals 三都賦," Zuo Si openly criticizes the practice of such Han *fu* poets as Yang

Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E – 18) and Zhang Heng 張衡 (78 – 139), who represent things in their *fu* poems that cannot be verified with evidence either from the historical records or from reality itself. He observes that such "groundless words without proof, although beautiful, can never become classics (*侈言無驗，雖麗非經*)" ("Preface to A *Fu* of Three Capitals"). He claims that all the things he describes in the poem are verifiable. This is how he puts it himself:

> Following Zhang Heng's "A Fu of Two Capitals," I composed this "Fu of Three Capitals." All the mountains, rivers, cities and towns [presented in the poem] are verifiable according to maps; all the birds, animals, grasses and trees I describe have all been checked against the local records of those regions. The popular rimes, songs and dances are all described according to their local customs; those famous families referred to in the poem also really existed. Why they have to be so? Well, those who sing in *shi* poetry (*詩*) sing of their intent; those who climb aloft glorify what they see. Glorification of things should be according to their original state (*yi qi ben* *依其本*); beautification of events is better based on their truth (*ben qi shi* *本其實*). If it is not according to its original state, nor its truth, how can it be convincing to the readers? ("Preface to A Fu of Three Capitals" *sandu fu xu* *三都賦序*)

"A Fu of Three Capitals" belongs, as Liu Zhenxiang 劉禎祥 and Li Fangchen 李方晨 observe in their annotation to this poem, to "a sub-genre of *fu* which vividly describes a city's buildings and the local history, geography, mountains, rivers, special produces, local customs of the city and surrounding areas. Such a poem is almost a condensed historical record of the region" (1984:217). No wonder it took Zuo Si ten years to finish the poem. Zuo Si was so careful in verifying the truth of everything that he describes in the poem obviously because he firmly believed that only poems which represent truthfully can have any impact on the reader. Literary writing has to reflect reality also because it is a means for the kings to "observe the local customs" of all the eight

directions without leaving their courts ("Preface to a Fu of Three Capitals"). This poem of Zuo Si and his literary ideas as expressed in the preface to the poem was very influential for a long time. According to the *History of Jin Dynasty* (*jinshu* 晉書), this poem of Zuo Si was so popular that the price of paper in the whole Luo Yang city increased drastically because people were so eager to have a copy of their own. Many poets of the time and from later periods, among them Huang Fumi 黃甫謐 (215-283), Zhang Zai 張載, Wei Quan 衛權, had written prefaces and annotations to the poem, and all highly praised the poem for its truthful representation of the three capitals.

Another important poem of the Jin period, which has been influential in literary theory, is Lu Ji's 陸機(261-303) "A *Fu* on Writing (*wen fu* 文賦)[15]." Most modern scholars tend to single out the one line: "poetry [*shi*] traces emotions and should be exquisite as fine patterned silk," as the catch phrase and stress that Lu Ji definitely has an expressive theory of literature (James Liu, 1975:29, Chen Liangyun, 1991:44). Upon closer examination, a *xingsi* theory and a mimetic tendency is unmistakably clear in the poem as well. In order to clarify what Lu Ji really thinks literary writing is, let us put the isolated line back into its context and have a careful look:

> The modes of writing there are many,
> But for the myriad things in nature, there is no single measure,
> Their manifestations are multifarious, therefore,
> Their forms are difficult to describe.
> [In writing] [w]ords bring forth the talents [of the writer],
> The concept [of the writer] takes control, functioning as a real craftsman;
> No matter if it is something concrete or abstract, its investigation should engage the best effort.
> And no poet should spare any effort when determining the depth of [delineation]:
> Although the writer may need to deviate from the regular rules,

He should keep it his goal to exhaust the forms and thoroughly cover the images (*qiongxing jingxiang* 窮形盡象).

Those who love to show off are prone to excess,
Those who are of a light heart value what is proper,
Those who feel frustrated speak of incomparable oppression,
And those who embrace a sanguine philosophy write optimistically.

Shi poetry traces emotions and should be exquisite as fine patterned silk;
Fu poetry embodies objects and should be clear as limpid water. [16]
...

In these few stanzas, Lu Ji is obviously discussing the various modes or genres of writing. He points out that the reasons for the need or existence of the different modes of writing is two-fold: first, there are so many different writing modes because the writers are of different inclinations. This certainly reminds us of Aristotle's theory of why poetry developed into different genres, because Aristotle also points out that poetry diverged in the directions of the natural dispositions of the poets: the graver minds wrote tragedies and the meaner kind wrote comedies. (*Poetics* IV). Secondly, and more importantly, the goal of writing is "to exhaust the forms and thoroughly cover the images," or as Siu-kit Wong freely translates the line, "[e]ven when he [the poet] finds it difficult to turn a circle into a square,/ He should still consider it his duty to portray the real in absolute details" (1983:43). Since "there is no single measure" for the multifarious forms of the myriad things in nature, it is natural that we need the numerous modes of writing so as to exhaust them. In other words, the need of all the different genres is called for by the goal and nature of writing, which is "to exhaust the forms and thoroughly cover the images." Therefore, the conclusion that Lu Ji believes that the nature of writing is representational and that he emphasizes the importance of

xingsi is not so far-fetched. But what about the line "[*s*]*hi* poetry traces emotions and should be exquisite as fine patterned silk"? Well, my first response is that I am not trying to disapprove the possibility that Lu Ji may have believed that *shi* poetry is expressive. Secondly, I think we should be careful, however, in taking the word "*qing*" as an indication that poetry should be a spontaneous expression of the poet's personal feelings (James Liu, 1975:72, Siu-kit Wong, 1983:43). The word *qing*, according to Lu Ji himself,[17] as well as to most ancient scholars, means the manifestations of the nature (*xing* 性) of a person or a thing. The word was often applied to the myriad things in nature as well. As we have seen, in the *Commentaries to the Classics of Changes,* it is said that Lord Po Xi created the eight trigrams to "classify the *qing* of the myriad things (*yilei wanwu zhiqing* 以類萬物之情)." In such contexts, the term *qing* has generally been understood as the "true, innate natures" of things (Richard Lynn, 1994:77). Lu Ji himself also employs the term, *qing* in the same sense in one of his memos to the emperor, where he says,

> I, your subject, heard that when *qing* of an object manifests itself, although, the object is far away from us, it is easily discernible. When *shen* (spirit) is hidden within the forms, although the form is close to us, it is as difficult as discovering a secret" ("On the Five Classes" *wudeng lun* 五等論).

So it is possible that by *qing*, Lu Ji may be referring something besides human emotions. Even if we take the term *qing* as referring exclusively to human emotions, or even the poet's own personal emotions, and hence the conclusion that Lu Ji believes that *shi* poetry is expressive, it still does not exclude the fact that there is a clear emphasis in the poem on the representational nature of literary writing, because *shi* poetry is only listed as one of the many genres. Besides Lu Ji's clear statement on the

goal of writing, which we saw earlier, I can perhaps quote James Liu himself to support my last claim:

> … Lu Chi does not consider emotion to be the only substance of literature, for though he asserts, as we have seen, that "poetry traces emotions, and should be exquisite as fine patterned silk," he does so while enumerating ten literary genres, each with its own function and appropriate style. Moreover, in other parts of the *Exposition on Literature*, he repeatedly emphasizes *li,* which covers a range of meanings including, "reason," "principles of things," and "order." Thus, … Lu Ji's conception of literature is in fact not exclusively emotive (1975: 72).

Although James Liu does not admit the existence of any mimetic tendency in Lu Ji's conception of literature, he is open-minded enough to acknowledge the fact that Lu Ji's conception is not exclusively emotive. I think this is sufficient for our present discussion of Lu Ji's ideas on literature.

The idea that literary writing should aim at "exhaust[ing] the forms and thoroughly cover[ing] the images" remained the general trend during the few short dynasties after Jin. This has been documented by Liu Xie 劉勰 (465-532) in the *Wu Se* 物色 ("The Colors of Natural Objects") section of his masterpieces, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons:*

> Since the recent dynasties, literary writing has treasured *xingsi.* Writers were eager to pierce through to the inner state of a landscape and carefully study the appearances of plants and trees. Whatever their theme, they usually succeed in expressing something deep and profound in their poetry. To achieve perfection in the embodiment of things (*tiwu* 體物) depends on an intimate knowledge of the fitness of terms for certain specific descriptive purposes. Therefore, such perfect aptness of the skillful expression to the form of things may be likened to the relation between a seal and the seal ink paste, for the impression made reproduces the seal exactly to the minutest detail without further carving and cutting. Because of such skill, we are able to see the appearances of things

> through the description, or to experience the seasons by reading the words. ("The Colors of Natural Objects," *wuse* 物色)[18]

If Liu Xie's own attitude, in this section, toward this kind of writings, as often noted by modern scholars, is a bit ambiguous, his stand is obvious in the following passage from the *shen si* 神思 (imaginative thinking) section of *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons:*

> Through the subtlety of the imagination, the spirit travels with the external things. The spirit resides in the chests; the key to its secret is controlled by the will (*zhi*) and vital force (*qi*). Physical things reach the mind through the ears and eyes, and the key to their apprehension is the skilled use of language. When the key works smoothly, no external things can hide its true form [from the description of words]. ("Imaginative Thinking" "*shen si*" 神思)

Liu Xie's focus of the whole section of *shen si* (imaginative thinking) is on how the poet should exert his/her mental ability during the process of literary creation. Liu Xie advises, obviously under the influence of Zhuang Zi, that the poet should cleanse his own spirit and keep it bright and still. But the final goal of the cleansing of spirit, as he puts it, is that "no external things can hide its true form [from the description of words]." That is to say, one important goal of writing is to represent the true forms of external things without leaving out any detail. If this is so, then his attitude on the literary trend that treasures *xingsi* may not appear so ambiguous after all.

If one were still to suspect that Liu Xie is ambiguous about the importance of *xingsi* in literary writings, there is no doubt that Zhong Rong 鍾榮 (466-518), Liu Xie's outstanding contemporary critic, has employed *xingsi* definitely as a positive criteria in his ranking of poets. In his *Classes of Poets* (*shipin* 詩品), Zhong Rong repeatedly uses *xingsi* as an evaluation of positive quality in his ranking of poets.

For example, this is how Zhong Rong comments on the poetry of Zhang Xie 張協, a first class poet in his ranking:

> His poetry follows the style of Wang Can 王粲. His language is beautiful and clean; his poetry seldom has flaws. He is skillful at words that reproduce physical resemblance (*xingsi zhiyan* 形似之言). As a poet, he is better than Pan Yue 潘岳, but paler than Zuo Zi 左思. He has a free and fluent style. He is, indeed, one of the greatest poets of his times. (*Jin huan meng liang Zhang Xie* 晉黃門郎張協)

He also comments on the landscape poet, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 as follows:

> The poetry of Xie Lingyun follows that of Cao Zhi, with a touch of Zhang Xie's style as well. Therefore, he treasures skillful resemblance. (*song lingchuan taishou Xie Lingyun* 宋臨川太守謝靈運)

With Zhong Rong, *xingsi* is not only a positive quality in the descriptive kind of poetry, that is, *fu*. He has extended it to poetry of the *shi* form as well, because the majority of the poets, such as the ones mentioned above, whom he comments upon in his book are *shi* poets. And his ranking of these poets are based, almost solely, on their *shi* poetry.

I guess we have, up to this point, seen enough evidence to convince ourselves that *xingsi* was indeed one of the dominant requirements of literary writings during the few hundred years between Han and Tang. But there remains the question: what does *xingsi* mean exactly when applied to literary writings? Is it the same in its application to literary theory as in painting theories? The answer to the latter question seems to be negative. As we recall, when applied to painting, the category of *xingsi* refers to a resemblance in mere physical features or appearances. It was often used in contrast to *shensi* and therefore acquired certain negative connotations. No great painter was ever satisfied with *xingsi* only; they all strove at going beyond it to achieve *shensi* in their

paintings. When applied to literary writing, however, the category of *xingsi,* as we have seen so far, does not have any negative connotation. Does it mean that the views of the poets during those few hundred years were so childish that they would be satisfied with a mere physical resemblance in their poems? Hardly! *Xingsi,* when applied to literature, is no longer understood as a shallow reflection of the physical form of objects. Here is how Master Kukai 弘法大师 (774-835), a Japanese monk scholar well-known in both Japan and China, defines *xingsi* in his book, *Bunkyo hifu ron* 文镜秘府論 (*The Secret Depths of Literature as a Mirror*):

> *Xingsi* refers to a form of writing, which describes the forms of things so as to achieve resemblance. [Such effects] can be reached through skillful and refined search, but cannot be obtained with rough measures. [We often read such] poetic lines as: "The flowers quiver in the breezes, their shadows cannot stand still/Although covered in dew drops, the green of bamboo still looks extravagant." Or: "Those trees, with their shadows on the lake, appear as if floating themselves; the clouds gradually close in on the mountains, it looks as if the mountains themselves are disappearing." Such would be examples of the form of writing that we call *xingsi.* ("Ten Forms" *shiti* 十體)

At first look, this definition is no different from that which has been generally applied to painting, because Master Kukai defines it as a description of the forms of things. However, the description of the forms is only the means to achieve resemblance. This resemblance is not limited to physical features. If we have a careful look at the examples he cites after the definition, we will find that they are not the static snapshot kind of images of things. Those lines are not focused on the minute details of, for example, the flower petals, but the dynamics of a natural scene. Such descriptions are not interested in, if we might borrow Johnson's words, "number[ing] the strips of tulips" (*Rasselas*, ch. 10, 133), but how a tulip looks or acts like in a certain moment

and situation. The final goal is to achieve a lively description of the scene in such a manner that the word-description brings out the real beauty and dynamics of nature. This is why such effects "cannot be obtained with rough measures." This is also why most of the scholars quoted earlier, who employ *xingsi* as a positive criterion, emphasize the importance of the poet's *yi* (concept or conceptual power) or *shen* (spirit) in the creative process.

To Lu Ji, for example, *xingsi* means "to exhaust the forms and thoroughly cover the images (*qiongxing jinxiang* 窮形盡象). While the term *xing* (form) can be understood as referring to physical aspects only, the term *xiang*, which I have translated, for the lack of a better word, as "images", is not just the physical appearances. The *Appended Phrases* (*jici zhuan* 系辭傳) in the *Book of Changes* explains *xiang* by remarking that "the sages had means to perceive the hidden secrets of things under the sky; they made images out of their forms to represent their suitabilities" (VIII). Therefore, images are not just physical appearances but physical characteristics that the poet believes best manifest the hidden aspects of the thing: its innate nature, inner principles, dynamics, etc. Lu Ji claims, in the preface to his own "Fu on Writing," that the reason why he wrote the "Fu on Writing" is because he "often fear[s] that his words may fail to match his concepts, and his concepts may fail to match the [truth of] things." The main goal of the poem is to solve this problem and give advice on how to exert the poet's own mind so that the true nature of things may be exhaustively represented with words. Liu Xie, as we saw earlier, also stressed the importance of the poet's active role. In order to achieve the goal that "no external things can hide its true form [from the description of words]," or in order for a description to enable the reader

"to see the appearances of things through the description, or to experience the seasons by reading the words," the poet has to cleanse his own spirit, let his mind travel with the objects so that he can thoroughly understand it. In the conclusion of the *shen si* ("imaginative thinking") section, Liu Xie concludes that "[although] the objects can only be studied through their appearances, the heart [of the poet] has to respond with *li* 理 (that is, inner principles, or order)" (*shen si, Literary Mind*). Viewed together with his earlier observation in the same section that "[p]hysical things reach the mind through the ears and eyes, and the key to their apprehension is the skilled use of language," Liu Xie's idea of the representation of things in literature sounds very close to Zong Bing's belief that the painter "responds [to natural objects] with his eyes [and] comprehends with his heart so as to reach their inner principle 應目會心成理" ("Preface to Landscape Paintings"). Consequently, we may conclude that *xingsi* as a category in literary theory is no longer understood as a shallow, literal copy of things. To a great extent, it includes those requirements as postulated by the *shensi* theory in painting as well.

However, I must state that by observing that the category of *xingsi* in literary theory, as employed in the writings of Lu Ji, Liu Xie, and Zhong Rong, also includes, to a great extent, those requirements of the *shensi* theory in painting, I am not agreeing with such modern scholars as Zheng Yuyu 鄭毓瑜 (1988) who insists that the *yi* and *shen* of the poet, which play a key role in the creative process, have been transferred to the object and become the *shen* that is expressed through the descriptions of natural objects. Zheng Liuyu treats Liu Xie's term *shen* as in *shen si* (imaginative thinking) or the subjective spirit of the poet and the term *xing* as in *xingsi* (resemblance in forms) as

if they were parallel categories, and claims that from Liu Xie's discussion of the poet's *shen* we can clearly see Liu Xie's ideas on the relationship of *xing* and *shen* in literature. But when Liu Xie discusses *shen* and Lu Ji talks about *yi*, they are not talking about the content of literature, but the means, or in James Liu's schema, Phase II of literary creation. We should be careful not to mistake the means for the substance. The theoretical category of *shen* as opposed to *xing* was not clearly proposed in literary theory until the late Tang dynasty by Si-kong Tu 司空圖(837-908) in his *Twenty-Four Moods of Poetry* (*ershisi shipin* 二十四詩品).

In many of the twenty-four poems which Si-kong Tu uses to explain the twenty-four moods of poetry, he advocates the need to go beyond physical details and capture the essence of nature. In the poem entitled "*xing rong* 形容 (Embodying and Describing)," for example, he writes:

> The changing appearance of wind-swept clouds,
> The quintessential spirit [*ching-shen*] of flowers and plants,
> The waves and billows of the sea,
> The rugged crags of the mountains –
> All these resemble the great Dao:
> Identify with them intuitively, even to the dust.
> Leave forms behind but catch true likeness,
> Then you will come close to being the right man.[19]

As the painters who emphasized *shensi* in painting, Si-kong Tu here explicitly declares that literary descriptions should aim at the quintessential spirit of the things being described. Although I generally accept James Liu's translation of the above poem, I have two reservations on his interpretation of it. First, the line translated as "Leave forms behind but catch true likeness" may be better translated as "Go beyond forms

and catch true likeness." Literally, the original line, *li xing de si* 離形得似 may suggest that, as some other modern scholars[20] understand it, a true likeness is possible only if the physical forms are left behind. But looking at the poem itself, I find it hard to believe that Si-kong Tu really meant that by this poem. As the title indicates, the poem is meant to be describing the kind of poetry, which embodies and describes natural objects or scenes. Besides, the objects that he lists for description are not purely abstract materials, but clouds, flowers, plants, cliffs and waves. He mentions not only the "quintessential spirit" but also "the changing appearances." There is no doubt that the poem stresses resemblance in spirit over formal resemblance. But to conclude that Si-kong Tu views resemblance in spirit and formal resemblance as mutually exclusive seems to be against the whole purpose of the poem itself. Therefore, I believe that it may be closer to Si-kong Tu's original meaning if we follow Du Lijun 杜黎均 and understand it as "poetic description should go beyond, instead of being confined by, formal resemblance" (1988:21).

Secondly, I find it also hard to agree with James Liu's reading of a metaphysical theory of literature from this poem. James Liu believes that this poem clearly expresses a metaphysical theory of literature because in the poem, "Ssu-k'ung T'u has conveyed through poetic imagery his conception of poetry as an embodiment of the poet's intuitive apprehension of and identification with the Tao of Nature" (1975:36). I agree that it is highly possible that Si-kong Tu may have a metaphysical idea of literature, because he employs the term *Dao* in several of the twenty four poems. In this poem, however, the contemplation and manifestation of the cosmic *Dao* does not seem to be his concern. The poet is advised to identify with such natural objects as the clouds,

plants, waves, etc., not to contemplate, through these natural objects, the cosmic *Dao*, but, rather, to capture the spirit, or the "true likeness," of those natural objects in literary works. The two lines, "All these resemble the great Tao:/Identify with them intuitively, even to the dust," may simply mean that the nature or the spirit of natural things is just as difficult to grasp as the cosmic *Dao*. Therefore, the poet needs to identify completely with them to be able to represent them in their "true likeness." Si-kong Tu, like many other ancient Chinese poets and painters, had the highest degree of admiration for the creative power of Nature. They all attempted to attain such creative ability as a poet or painter, not by competing with, but learning from, and identifying as much as possible with, Nature. However, the purpose of such identification, as we have seen in the context of Chinese painting theories, is not to represent the cosmic *Dao* but to create, in the same effortless manner, lively images of things in nature. For example, in the poem entitled "Naturalness (*ziran* 自然)," Si-kong Tu advises that "follow the *Dao* and go with it/Whatever you set your hands on will come to life as if in spring." In another poem entitled "quintessential spirit (*jingshen* 精神)," he explains that *jingshen* means "the lively vital force [of things described] clearly comes out;/there is no sign of dead dust./Miraculously approximate Nature/Who could then criticize [such a poem]." Both observations reveal the idea as expressed in the poem that we quoted earlier: following or identifying with the *Dao* is only a means; the end is to make things come to life on paper.

After Si-kong Tu, the category of *xingsi* in literary theory was also degraded to a level of secondary importance and gradually obtained a negative connotation just as in painting theories. One important figure that contributes to the prominence of *shensi* in

both painting and literary theories is Su Dongpo, whose views on this topic we have discussed in detail in the previous section. Another scholar of the Song Dynasty who added to the popularity of the *shensi* theory in literary theories is Yan Yu 嚴羽(1180?-1235?) of the Southern Song dynasty. Although Yan Yu, as James Liu rightly observes, "has more to say about how to write poetry and how to judge it than what poetry is" (1975:37), his following remarks on the importance of *shen* in poetry have been very well known and influential on the Chinese idea of what poetry is:

> The ultimate attainment of poetry lies in one thing: entering the spirit [*ju-shen*]. If poetry enters the spirit, it has reached perfection, the limit, and nothing can be added to it. (*Cang Lang's Remarks on Potery canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話)

Unfortunately, Yan Yu gives us very little indication as to what he means by "entering the spirit" exactly. As a result, the interpretation of the term "entering the spirit" has been widely different among modern scholars. Some modern Chinese scholars suggest that remarks such as these indicate an expressive theory, which demands that poetry expresses the poet's own subjective thoughts and feelings. Chen Liangyun, for example, believes the spirit as in "entering the spirit" does not refer to the *shen* of the things in the objective world, but the subjective *shen* of the poet. He concludes that "this subjective *shen* [of the poet] does not simply extend itself to the objective world. Instead, it seeks *self-cultivation and self-expression*" (1991:250). To Chen Liangyun and scholars sharing his view, the poet completely identifies with the objective world, as urged by early scholars such as Si-kong Tu and Yan Yu, not in order to understand the objective world, but "to express the poet's own subjective *shen* with the forms of the physical world. Through his artistic creation, the poet's subjective *shen* is

completely transferred into the objective world [i.e., his subject-matter], and the poet's self is thus realized in the artistic world he creates. From the reader's point of view, when he appreciates the imagery of an artistic creation, his chief intention is not to understand the objective world, but to peek into the subjective and spiritual world of the poet through the imagery the poet has created." Chen Liangyun believes that such a theory of poetry has already matured and completed in the works of Si-kong Tu (837–908) of the Tang Dynasty and Yan Yu (1180?-1235?) of Southern Song period (1991: 250).

From our previous discussion on Si-kong Tu's view on *shen* in poetry, we have seen that the *shen* that Si-kong Tu believes poetry should capture is not the subjective *shen* of the poet as Chen Liangyun suggests. As to the real meaning of Yan Yu's "entering the spirit," I believe James Liu (1975, 1965) has the most thorough discussion and best conclusion. In his 1965 book, *The Art of Chinese Poetry,* James Liu explains the terms as:

> What he [Yan Yu] means by 'entering the spirit', I think, is to enter imaginatively into the life of things and embody their essence, their spirit, in one's poetry. In other words, the poet should not assert his own personality but assume a 'Negative Capability' (to borrow Keats's term), so as to identify himself with the object of his contemplation. That is why Yen Yu, while admitting that poetry is concerned with emotion, disapproves of any excessive display of it. (1965:82)

Obviously, James Liu understands the spirit or *shen* as in "entering the spirit" to be that of the objective things and referring to "the life of things," "their essence, their spirit." When James Liu comes back to the topic ten years later, in his *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975), although he admits that it is also possible to understand it as "entering the realm of the marvelous or divinely-inspired," he stands firmly behind his

original interpretation of the term. He produces much more evidence this time by tracing the usage of the term from the time of the Book of Changes to Liu Xie, to Si-kong Tu, and concludes that "whether we take *shen* to mean the 'spirit' or 'essence of things' or the 'divine' and god-like,' 'entering the *shen*' involves reaching beyond or penetrating the material world" (1975:38). Therefore, we may, perhaps, conclude, with James Liu, that

> Yen Yu regards poetry neither as moral teaching nor as literary exercise, nor even as self-expression, but as an embodiment of the poet's vision of the world, or to put it the other way round, of the world reflected through the poet's consciousness." (1965:82)

Unfortunately, however, James Liu does not think this counts as a mimetic view of literature. In 1965, he calls it the "Intuitionalist view," while in 1975 he categorizes it as the "Metaphysical view." As I have admitted in the previous chapter, I do not doubt that there is an intuitionalist view on literary creation among traditional Chinese scholars such as Si-kong Tu, Yan Yu and even Su Dongpo. But the intuitionalist approach concerns the question of how poetry is written, instead of the problem of what poetry is. Consequently, the fact that these scholars had an Intuitionalist view on the creative process of literature should not blind us to the fact these scholars also propose that literature should embody "the poet's vision of the world," or capture true likeness of things in the real world. I guess James Liu realizes this himself when he develops the diagram on the interrelationships between the four elements in literary processes: namely, Universe, Writer, Work and Reader[21]. That is probably why he drops the category of Intuitionalist view of literature from his 1975 book on Chinese literary

theories and classifies Si-Kong Tu and Yan Yu's ideas of *shen* under the new label of "Metaphysical view."

James Liu's reluctance in admitting that the mimetic tendency ever developed into a major current in Chinese theories of literature largely results, it seems, from the following factors.

First, when scholars talk about grasping the spirit of the things in the objective world, they often involve, as we saw in the case of Si-kong Tu, the term *Dao*. Therefore, it appears that the "identity of the 'universe'" that literature is supposed to represent in the Chinese context is drastically different from that as defined in the Western tradition. In the former, it is, he believes, purely transcendental, while in the latter, it ranges from "the material world, or the human society, or the transcendental (Platonic Idea or God)" (1975:47). *Dao* does not, however, have to be transcendental or metaphysical in the Chinese context. As we have seen in our second chapter, *Dao* has also been understood as that which dwells within concrete objects in nature and governs the way they operate. In other words, *Dao* is concretized into *li* (inner principles, innate nature, order) in natural and human world, and it is often the *Dao* on this concrete level that interests the painters and poets most. That this is so has been demonstrated, I hope, in our earlier discussions on the theories of Zong Bing, Su Dongpo as well as Si-kong Tu. Therefore, when painters, poets and critics advocate *shensi* or when they urge the poets to go beyond formal resemblance to achieve true likeness, they are not so much advising the artists and poets to transcend the material or human world as suggesting that they should penetrate beneath the surface of the material or human world. Finally, even if we grant that the identify of the universe for

the Chinese literary theorist is purely transcendental, who is it to say that while Plato and the neo-platonic idea that poetry should represent the Transcendental Ideal counts as mimetic but the Chinese version does not?

The second factor that prevents James Liu from acknowledging a mimetic theory in the Chinese tradition seems to be his belief that while "in Western mimetic theories the poet is either conceived of as consciously imitating Nature or human society, as in Aristotelian and neoclassical theories, or as being possessed by the Divine and unconsciously uttering oracles, as described by Plato in the *Ion*" (1975:48-9), the Chinese poet's capturing of *shen* was "intuitive." This is very true. But again, this difference concerns how to imitate rather than whether poetry is mimetic.

Another, albeit minor, factor in James Liu's unwillingness to admit a Chinese mimetic theory of literature is, as he puts it, "the literal meaning of the word 'mimetic'" (1975:49). Although, he acknowledges that he is "aware that the Greek *mimesis* or its English equivalent, 'imitation,' does not always mean 'copying in the literal sense" (1975:49), he still feels uncomfortable labeling what he categorizes as a "metaphysical view" mimetic. I fully sympathize with such uneasiness, because, taken literally, the term 'imitation' indeed suggests a passive, superficial copy of the physical appearances, which is nothing even close to what the Chinese *shensi* theory demands. Literary and fine arts demand the active participation, one way or another, of the artists' own mind and heart; they necessarily involve the perspectives and life views of the artists, as well. They should never be viewed as a passive copy of what meets the eyes. The truth, however, is, as we have seen in our first chapter, *mimesis* in the West has nothing in common with the literal sense of the word either. Therefore, if we can agree with

Golden that literature as *mimesis* means that literature is "*an interpretation, an understanding of history*" or nature (1981:290), or if we accept Hamilton Fyfe's explanation that *mimesis* in the Western tradition really means that "[t]he poet represents life as seen through the medium of his own personality" (1961:1), then James Liu would not, perhaps, be so reluctant to acknowledge the fact that a mimetic theory of literature has, indeed, occupied an important place in the history of Chinese literature and fine arts theories.

Notes

[1] Quoted in Chen Liangyun 陳良運. *Shixue Shiguan Shimei (詩學 詩觀 詩美 Poetics and Poetical Beauty)*. (Nan Chang: Jiangxi University Press 江西大學出版社, 1991) 240-244.

[2] For a detailed discussion of the development of the concept of *shen* in ancient times, please refer to Chen Liangyun 陳良運. *Shixue Shiguan Shimei (詩學 詩觀 詩美 Poetics and Poetical Beauty)*. (Nan Chang: Jiangxi University Press 江西大學出版社, 1991) 240-244.

[3] Translation of quotations from *Zhuang Zi* in this chapter is based upon Burton Watson (1968), with minor modifications by myself.

[4] Buddhism has to insist that *shen* never dies in order to maintain its belief in samsara, because if a person's *shen* dies with the body, there would not even be a next life, and therefore it would be impossible for a person's sins to come back and revisit him/her in the next life.

[5] Quoted from Qi Zhixiang 祁志祥. *Zhongguo Gudai Wenxue Yuanli (中國古代文學原理, Principles of Ancient Chinese Literature)*. (Shanghai: Xueling Chubanshe 學林出版社, 1993) 232.

[6] Quoted in *Lidai Lunhua Mingzhu Huibian 歷代論畫名著匯編 (Masterpieces about Theories of Painting from All Dynasties)*. Ed. Shen Zicheng 沈子丞. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1982) 34.

[7] Quoted from *Lidai Lunhua Mingzhu Huibian 歷代論畫名著匯編 (Masterpieces about Theories of Painting from All Dynasties)*. Ed. Shen Zicheng 沈子丞. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1982) 35.

[8] Zhang Yanyuan makes a very interesting point in this passage, that is, that painting can represent events/deeds involving the great sages and former kings. Most likely Zhang Yanyuan had got this idea from many of the Han Dynasty paintings in his collection. However, this idea was not developed any further by later painters.

[9] The original text of the quotations from various ancient Chinese painters in this chapter are based on *Lidai Lunhua Mingzhu Huibian 歷代論畫名著匯編 (Masterpieces about Theories of Painting from All Dynasties)*. Ed. Shen Zicheng 沈子丞. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1982). Since they are often found in various other sources, I will simply use the title of the original text, instead of the page number, as the source for these quotations.

[10] Literally, *liufa* 六法 means *six techniques*. However, they do not really refer to actual techniques of painting, but six major aspects of painting that a painter is supposed to master. Therefore, instead of *six techniques*, I have tentatively translated them as "six aspects."

[11] Quoted in Chen Chuanxi 陳傳席 *LiuChao Hualun Yanjiu 六朝畫論研究(Studies on the Painting Theories of the Six Dynasties)*. (Taibei: Xueshen shuju 學生書局, 1991) 51.

[12] Quoted in Qi Zhixiang 祁志祥. *Zhongguo Gudai Wenxue Yuanli (中國古代文學原理, Principles of Ancient Chinese Literature)*. (Shanghai: Xueling Chubanshe 學林出版社, 1993) 228.

[13] For more such anecdotes, please refer to Osborne, Harold. *Aesthetics and Art Theory*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1968) 33-34. Osborne has gathered, from sources such as Pliny and Vasari, Boccaccio, more than a dozen of such anecdotes.

[14] *Ut pictura poesis*. Quoted from E. E. Sikes. *The Greek View of Poetry*. 74.

[15] The poem is sometimes translated as *Exposition on Literature* (James Liu, 1975:70), or "A Descriptive Poem on Literature" (Siu-kit Wong, 1983:39). I decide to use the name of "A *Fu* on Writing" because by the term *wen*, Lu Ji

not only includes literary writings as we know them today, but the whole spectrum of writing forms, from poetry of the *shi* and *fu* forms to epitaphs, argumentative essays and court memos.

[16] The last two lines are based on James Liu's translation (1975:28) with slight modification of mine. James Liu's translation seems to be the best version among the available English translations, but unfortunately, he did not provide a complete translation of the poem, I have attempted to present my own of the few stanzas quoted here.

[17] Cf. "The Biography of Lu Ji," in *The History of Jin Dynasty* (*Jinshu- Lu Ji chuan* 晉書- 陸機傳).

[18] Based upon the translation of Vincent Yun-chung Shih (1959:248), with minor modifications of mine.

[19] Translation James Liu's. Quoted in Liu, James J. Yu. *Chinese Theories of Literature*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975) 35.

[20] Cf. *A Dictionary of World* Poetics, ed. Yue Daiyun, Ye Lang, et. al. (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1993) 280.

[21] Please see the Introduction of this dissertation for a detailed discussion on James Liu's model of the creative process.

Afterword

The central concern of this dissertation is to demonstrate that, contrary to the belief of many modern scholars, a mimetic theory has not only existed, but has also occupied a very prominent position in the Chinese literary tradition. For such a seemingly simple task we have definitely traveled a long way.

With the intention of establishing a frame of reference, we first re-examined, in Chapter 1, the traditional meanings of artistic *mimesis* in the Western context. We discovered that as a concept describing the relationship between world and artistic work, artistic *mimesis* in the West has rarely been viewed as a passive and superficial copy of reality. Rather, it has often been viewed as an interpretation and understanding of history and life (Golden, 1981:290). As such, *mimesis* necessarily involves the active intellectual, cognitive and even emotional participation on the part of the poet. The poet is only an imitator in so far as he/she is a maker (Else, 1967:322). The poet as imitator is not, therefore, someone who stands aloof and passively imitates what is in front of his/her eyes. The poet, instead, "represents life as seen through the medium of his[/her] own personality" (Fyfe, 1961:1).

We then started our examination of artistic *mimesis* in the Chinese context, in Chapter 2, with its philosophical and cultural foundation. We demonstrated, through our brief look at the Daoist and Confucian order of the universe, that to the ancient Chinese, just as to the ancient Greeks, *mimesis* constitutes the basis of man's relation with Nature. We also demonstrated that this mimetic tendency has been fundamental to the later development of Chinese art and literary theories and practice. Next, we studied,

in Chapter 3, the long tradition of *Shijing* criticism and revealed that starting from the "Great Preface" to *Shijing* commentaries of the recent centuries, there had always been an unmistakable mimetic assumption on the nature of poetry. Such an assumption is especially evident in the traditional Chinese view on the relationship between poetry and history as well as in the traditional classification and definition of the "Six Arts" of the *Shijing*. Lastly, in Chapter 4, we closely examined the Chinese theories of *shensi* and *xingsi* in fine arts and literary theories. We have seen that both *shensi* and *xingsi* emphasizes a clear resemblance (*si* 似) to reality, albeit in different aspects. While *xingsi* emphasizes physical or formal resemblance, *shensi* demands a resemblance in spirit, essence and nature. Therefore, the real dispute between these two theories is not whether art is mimetic but what counts as true artistic *mimesis*.

With the evidence we have provided in the previous chapters, I believe we can now conclude with confidence that the Chinese literary tradition is not really non-mimetic or un-mimetic as suggested by modern scholars such as Earl Miner and James Liu. Aristotle's theory (*Poetics* V) that the human being is the most imitative animal and learns by imitation also applies to the ancient Chinese. The universal mimetic instinct of man has also played a definite role in Chinese literary theories and a mimetic theory has formed one of the major currents in Chinese fine arts and literary theories and practice.

However, by claiming that a mimetic theory has occupied an important position in Chinese art and literary theories, I am not suggesting that the Chinese mimetic theory has dominated the whole history of Chinese literary tradition, nor am I indicating that the Chinese mimetic theory is exactly the same as that of the West. In this dissertation, I

have confined myself to the question of whether the Chinese art and literary tradition is non-mimetic. All I want to achieve is for more scholars to acknowledge the existence of a mimetic theory in the Chinese context. Only when we acknowledge its existence, can we seriously set out to answer such questions as what the Chinese mimetic theory and that of the West share and how they differ from each other in terms of the objects, means and manner of imitation. Once a mimetic theory is acknowledged in the Chinese tradition, it also opens up questions such as whether there has been a mimetic theory in Chinese theories of drama and fiction between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries; and if there has been such a theory, how does it compare to that in the West. To answer all these questions is not only beyond the scope of the present dissertation, but also beyond, I feel, my present research capability. I therefore leave these questions to the more capable minds in those fields.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

Gudai Jindai Wenxue Yanjiu: *Zhongguo Gudai Jindai Wenxue Yanjiu: Baokan Ziliao Xuanhui* (中國古代近代文學研究: 報刊資料選匯 *Studies on Chinese Literature of the Classical and Recent Periods: A Selective Collection of [Current] Publications from Academic Journals)*. ed. Xie Zili 謝自立 (general ed.), Qiu Haiping 邱海平(ass. general ed.), Yu Hongpo 余洪波 (editor). Beijing: Renmin Daxue Baokan Zilao Zhongxin (人民大學報刊資料中心 Center for Newspaper and Periodical Material Selection, People's University of China).

HWNB Ziliao: *Lianghan Weijin Nanbeichao Wenxue Piping Ziliao Huibian* (兩漢魏晉南北朝文學批評資料匯編 *Sources of Literary Criticism during the Han, Wei, Jin and Nanbei Dynasties*). Ed. Zeng Yongyi 曾永義, Ke Qingming 柯慶明. Taipei: Chengwen Chubanshe 成文出版社,1978.

Quanhan Fu: *Quanhan Fu* (全漢賦 *An Anthology of the Complete Fu Writings of the Han Dynasties*). Ed. Fei Zhengang 費振剛, et al. Beijing: Peking University Press 北京大學出版社, 1993.

SBBY: Sibu Beiyao (四部備要 *A Collection of Major Chinese Writings of All Four Categories)*. Taiwan: Taiwan Zhonghua Shuju 臺灣中國書局, 1965 rpt.

Wenyi Lilun: *Wenyi Lilun: Baokan Ziliao Xuanhui* (文藝理論: 報刊資料選匯 *Literary Theory: A Selective Collection of [Current] Publications from Academic Journals)*. ed. Xie Zili 謝自立(general ed.), Qiu Haiping 邱海平(ass. general ed.), He Zhici 何志慈(editor). Beijing: Renmin Daxue Baokan Zilao Zhongxin (人民大學報刊資料中心 Center for Newspaper and Periodical Material Selection, People's University of China).[1]

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[1] This Center is maintaining a monthly selection of current academic publications from journals all through mainland China. Articles selected are reprinted in three separate sets, named respectively as *Wenyi Lilun (Literary Theory), Zhongguo Gudai, Jindai Wenxue Yanjiu (Studies on Chinese Literature of the Classical and Recent Periods) and Zhonguo Xiandai, Dangdai Wenxue Yanjiu (Studies on Chinese Literature of the Modern and Present Periods)*. Most of the important articles from Mainland China on Chinese literature and literary theory that were originally published in other journals can be found in these three sets. Since

Part I. Sources On Chinese Literary Theory

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Fei Ziye 裴子野 (496-530). *Diaochong Lun* (*雕蟲論On the Carving of Insects).* in HWNB Ziliao.

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these sets are the most available in North America, I will cite them as the sources for articles they contain, instead of the original journals in which the articles first appeared.

[2] Many of the works included in this section have numberous modern pre-prints and annotated versions. I only included one or two versions of these works that are most accessible to me.

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2. Primary Texts in English Translation[3]

[3] While I have rendered the Wade-Giles system of transliteration of Chinese names, both author and title names, in the "Primary Sources" and "Secondary Sources" in Chinese sections into the Pinyin system, I will keep the translators' system as they are in their respective translations in this section and the "Sources in English" section.

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